

Peasant Political Consciousness in West Sumatra : A Reanalysis of the Communist Uprising of 1927

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| メタデータ | 言語: en 出版者: 公開日: 2009-04-28 キーワード (Ja): キーワード (En): 作成者: Kanh, Joel S. メールアドレス: 所属: |
| URL | https://doi.org/10.15021/00003351 |

Peasant Political Consciousness in West Sumatra: A Reanalysis of the Communist Uprising of 1927

JOEL S. KAHN

University College London

In this paper it is argued that the reasons for the growth of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in the 1920s are not adequately understood in the present literature. Taking account of the fact that the most militant support for the PKI was found in regions such as Banten (western Java) and West Sumatra, where a proletariat was only weakly developed, most analysts attribute the success of the communist movement to a willingness on the part of its leaders to manipulate a whole range of discontent which arose from the pressures of commercialization and rapid social change rather than from the specific effects of capitalism *per se*. Using available historical materials on a region of West Sumatra, I argue that the PKI mobilized small peasants, other small producers, petty traders and low-level civil servants who were quite aware of the specific effects of capitalist transformation in Sumatra. The articulation of opposition to *kafir* capitalism, far from being a confused amalgam of primordialism and modernism, can be shown to have been a rational response to the complete or partial dispossession of a peasantry who were not subsequently reintegrated within the foreign dominated economy as full proletarians. [COMMUNIST UPRISING, SUMATRA, INDONESIA]

INTRODUCTION

The success of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) in attracting large numbers of members and supporters in West Sumatra and Banten (western Java) in the 1920s posed and continues to pose seemingly intractable problems for the analysis of peasant political consciousness in South East Asia. It is the very nature of socio-economic conditions in these two regions that has puzzled political activists and investigators from the first: why should it be that what was one of the world's most successful communist movements at the time had taken root in regions where conditions were apparently so unfavourable, where peasantization rather than proletarianization was the main process at work? It is this apparent disjuncture between prevailing socio-economic conditions and ideological development that I shall be concerned with in this paper. The problems will be discussed by examining the success of the PKI in West Sumatra in attracting support from elements outside the developing working class, which was numerically weak in both West Sumatra and Banten in the 1920s (and indeed remains so today), namely from small traders

and businessmen, peasant villagers (including large numbers of peasant women), and low-level government workers (clerks, teachers and employees of agricultural and forestry services), in the period from March 1923, when the PKI established a branch office in the provincial capital Padang, until the outbreak of an armed uprising centred on the highland village of Silungkang on New Year's Day 1927.¹⁾

This paper is a preliminary result of one year's archival and field research carried out in 1981–2. I accumulated a large number of intellectual debts during this period, and I cannot begin to provide an exhaustive list here of all the people who have done so much to make the work possible. The research has been funded by the Social Science Research Council (London), the British Academy, the British Institute in South-East Asia, and the Nuffield Foundation—all of whom made contributions to the total cost of research. In addition to expressing my gratitude to these organizations, I would like to thank Dr. John Villiers of the British Institute for his personal help and guidance.

For three months in 1981 I was a visitor at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study, where I was provided with office space and a base for the first stage of archival work. I am also grateful to Macquarie University for a five week research fellowship which allowed me to visit Australian Indonesianists in Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra.

I have also incurred numerous personal debts of gratitude. In the Rijksarchief I was generously aided by H. de Graaff who provided me with a wealth of advice, and personally introduced me to the intricacies of the colonial archives. I am also indebted to F. Jaquet of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde (KIT), another archival authority who gave up much of his valuable time to me. Before I began the archival work, Akira Oki gave me both inspiration and considerable advice on how to begin the task. My student, Ken Young, has also been an inspiration. Peter Geschiere of the Free University provided me with a platform to present initial findings, and a valuable opportunity to discuss my theoretical framework while still in Holland. Others whose advice and help have been most welcome throughout the year include Mestika Zed, R. de Jong, Audrey Kahin, Anthony Reid, Howard Dicks, John Bern, Syed Husin Ali, Taufik Abdullah, K. S. Jomo, Maila Stivens, John and Norma Sullivan, and others too numerous to mention.

- 1) The year 1927 was hardly the end of the movement. In spite of a particularly strenuous repression of political activity after the uprisings, political reports submitted by the local government in the following years show that sympathizers continued to meet illegally in an attempt to revive the movement [see for example MR 1928 Nos. 881x, 1173x].

During the revolutionary period, the inheritors of the communist tradition continued their struggles both within the PKI itself, and within a separate party then known as the PKI Lokal Islami [see KAHIN 1979; KEMENTERIAN PENERANGAN n.d.], the latter being the organizational base of one of the most important peoples' armies (*laskar*) so active in the successful struggle against the Dutch.

The PKI Lokal Islami even survived the destruction in 1965 of the regular Communist party, reappearing in 1971 as the Dewan Pimpinan Pusat Karya Perdjuangan Penemai Indonesia; although this time the movement had been co-opted by the state ruling party Golkar. The document released by them in Padang on 17 February 1971 contains an almost totally revisionist account of the role of 'Islamic Communists' in the 1920s—an account in keeping with the views of their new political bedfellows. I am grateful to Audrey Kahin for drawing my attention to this document, and for providing me with information on the fate of the movement in the Revolutionary and post-Independence periods.

My central argument will suggest that the problem with existing analyses of the PKI, particularly in West Sumatra, is that they present us with a highly misleading account of the ideological, social and economic changes in West Sumatra which followed the capitalist transformation of the Indonesian colonial economy of the latter part of the nineteenth century. The accepted picture of an area dominated by a small peasantry undergoing only the strains of rapid commercialization is in many ways an inadequate description of the areas where the PKI found so many supporters.

BACKGROUND TO THE UPRISING

On New Year's Day 1927, members of the Silungkang branch of the PKI in West Sumatra embarked on what was to have been the first of a series of co-ordinated uprisings against Dutch colonial rule. The plans for co-ordinated revolution followed from the decision of the PKI national conference of 22 December 1925 that the time was ripe for revolution. And in spite of the opposition of prominent communists like Tan Malaka, 1926 saw the outbreak of a number of largely locally instigated armed struggles. The events in West Sumatra therefore followed on closely from those in Java, where the most widespread support for the call to arms was found in Banten [WILLIAMS 1982].

It is no accident that Silungkang should have taken the lead, for, as we shall see, the area to the south and east of Silungkang and Sawah Lunto had become centres of intense political activity by PKI sympathizers in the period immediately before the outbreak of violence. This is turn in linked to changing social and economic conditions in this region, which I shall term the Southern Frontier. Before looking more closely at these changes, however, a brief background discussion on political and ideological changes in the region is needed.

In one sense the events of 1927 are but the culmination of a period of protest and open rebellion which accompanied the capitalist transformation of the regional colonial economy beginning in the mid-1870s. The first sustained resistance erupted in 1908 when, after endless deliberation, the colonial government decided to impose a head tax to replace the system of forced deliveries instituted in the Minangkabau highlands in 1847.²⁾ Anti-tax movements continued to plague the colonial authorities in the following years, including a significant outbreak in the village of Kota Lawas in 1914.³⁾ Indeed the years following the defeat of the anti-tax rebels mark the beginning rather than the end of a period of fierce ideological and political opposition to Dutch rule.

The tax rebellions seem to have been led predominantly by orthodox Islamic leaders, teachers and mystics, the heirs of the Padris whose defeat had led to the first formal control of the highlands by the Dutch in the early nineteenth century. Their

2) These uprisings and their socio-economic causes are the subject of important research currently being written up by Young [1980].

3) Kota Lawas, significantly, was the village of origin of Hadji Datuk Batuah, one of the main organizers of the PKI in 1923.

main organizational bases were the *tarekat* (religious brotherhoods), although because of their relatively syncretistic notions of Islam, the orthodox organizations also found favour with the 'traditional' clan and lineage leaders (*panghulu*), or at least those of them who for various reasons did not form part of the colonial administrative hierarchy. In spite of the subsequent spread of Islamic modernism, it would be a mistake to view the Minangkabau peasant villager as a fundamentalist Islamic modernist. Indeed the syncretic beliefs of many, especially among the poorer strata of peasant villagers, continue even today to provide a potential for anti-government agitation.⁴⁾

In any case, by the mid-1910s there were new forces on the scene. The modernist movement has its roots in this period, and its development can be traced to the return from the Middle East of a number of religious teachers who had come under the influence of the Cairo-based modernist movement, and the political triumphs of Atatürk. Their opposition to colonialism developed out of an initial confrontation with *adat* (customary law), and particularly with those 'traditional' *adat* leaders on whom the Dutch had always relied for the penetration of colonial authority into the Minangkabau village (*nagari*).⁵⁾

While modernist and orthodox tendencies occasionally managed to find common cause in their opposition to perceived attacks on religion, by both colonial authorities and members of the so-called *adat* parties, from the mid-1910s there were increasing signs of conflict between supporters of the two tendencies. This was manifest both in doctrinal debates carried out in the pages of periodicals like *Al-Moenir* and *Al Achbar*, and also in the split that developed within Sarekat Islam from the year of its founding in Padang in 1916. From its first year in West Sumatra, Sarekat Islam was split along familiar red and white lines, although, unlike the case in Java, this represented respectively the orthodox and modernist factions [*Collectie Kern* No. 144].

The history of the PKI in West Sumatra is also quite different from that in Java. Throughout the period of the 'bloc within' strategy, when the PKI in Java attempted to operate by seizing control of Sarekat Islam [McVEY 1965: 76-104], there was no formal PKI organization in West Sumatra. Indeed the PKI did not establish a branch in Padang until March 1923, the year of the railway strike organized by the main communist union, the VSTP (Organization of Railway and Tramway Personnel). Several members of the small group who formed the Padang branch were in fact also members of the VSTP, including its second chairman K.W.A. Wahab

4) In fact the *aliran* analysis of political tendencies, articulated by Geertz, is inadequate in many ways [KAHN 1978], not least in the extension of its use to West Sumatra to describe the Minangkabau as *santri*.

5) The ideological climate in this period is nicely described in the writings of Taufik Abdullah [1967, 1971]. Abdullah's main interest is in the development of the Muslim modernist movement, known in Minangkabau as the Kaum Muda (the Young Group). Another important source for information on political developments in the period approximately 1918 to 1923 is the writings of the then Adviser for Native Affairs, R. Kern, and in the advice given by others to Kern and included in his advice to the Governor-General [see bibliography of unpublished sources, *Collectie Kern* Nos. 144, 145, 148].

who took over in late 1923 after the arrest of the first [MR 1927/711x; *Collectie Kern* No. 146].

It was in 1923 that political activities against the Dutch again come to the forefront. The moderate Sarekat Islam leader, Abdul Muis, returned to his home province that year, and he was the main instigator of two major meetings called in protest against colonial policies. The first meeting in Padang on 7 March attracted a fairly small number of people, but the second meeting on 1 April in Padang Panjang attracted hundreds (some said even thousands) of Minangkabau, including representatives of all shades of political opinion. Communists, modernists, orthodox teachers, even 36 *adat* leaders, came together to protest against the proposed tax on lineage houses, the possible imposition of a land tax, and the marking out of forest reserves [*Collectie Kern* No. 144].⁶⁾

At the time of the mass meeting, the PKI represented a relatively small part of the opposition. Its leaders apparently alienated a large proportion of the united opposition, and were dismissed as urban upstarts who were in any case likely to meet with little success in the Minangkabau heartland with their largely pro-proletarian line.

However, towards the end of 1923, and from then until the end of 1926, the PKI did manage to expand into the Minangkabau heartland, finding large numbers of supporters among the peasantry and traders, in spite of what Kern and others assumed would be the insuperable obstacles of adherence to *adat* and Islam. It is this expansion to which we shall now turn.

THE EXPANSION AND DECLINE OF THE PKI: 1923-1925

Two events are usually cited as being crucial to the success of the communist movement in West Sumatra. The first was the decision by the colonial government to banish Abdul Muis for his role in the events of 1923, a decision opposed with good reason by Kern, the then adviser on 'native affairs' [*Collectie Kern* No. 144].⁷⁾ The second was the return to West Sumatra of Natar Zainudin and Hadji Datuk Batuah from North Sumatra [*Collectie Kern* No. 145]. Zainudin, who had a Minangkabau mother and an Indian father, was a tram conductor who was exiled from Aceh for his role in the VSTP strike there. Hadji Datuk Batuah, from the village of Kota Lawas, met with Natar and was converted by him to the communist cause.⁸⁾ Batuah's role

6) The land tax was never implemented, due largely to the obvious widespread opposition.

7) This is an explanation on which Taufik Abdullah puts great weight. Muis, a Minangkabau, was a popular man and a formidable organizer who would, so the argument goes, have made great inroads on the communist constituency. Indeed it is said that the reason behind the founding of a PKI branch in 1923 was to counteract Muis's influence. There is some truth in this, and yet as I shall show, the communist platform was probably much closer to the perceived aims of the peasantry in the Southern Frontier region, and hence not too much explanatory value should be given to Muis's exile.

8) It should again be noted, however, that Batuah came from Kota Lawas, an area known since 1914 for its strenuous opposition to Dutch rule. He was also a student of Hadji Rasul, a well-known modernist and teacher at the Sumatera Thawalib school in Padang Panjang.

Table 1. Membership of the Sarekat Rakyat at the End of 1924

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|-----------------------|-----|
| Lubuk Basung | 114 |
| Sungai Sarik | 110 |
| Kota Lawas | 101 |
| Solok | 79 |
| Fort de Kock | 54 |
| Sawah Lunto | 49 |
| Tikalas | 28 |
| Kacang | 25 |
| Silungkang | 25 |
| Muara Labuh | 24 |
| Fort van der Capellen | 24 |
| Payakumbuh | 21 |
| Scattered members | 6 |
| Total | 660 |

Source: Schrieke in Benda and McVey [1960].

was to be crucial since he was both a *hadji* (a returned pilgrim) and a *panghulu*, and hence could not be so easily written off by Minangkabau villagers as could the young workers who founded the PKI in Padang. Under the leadership of these men, Padang Panjang in the highlands became an important centre from which communist influence could be spread to Minangkabau villages.⁹⁾

The role of those two men in the success of the communist movement is well known, and needs no extended discussion here. It is sufficient to point out that they were the force behind two of the more influential communist periodicals in this period (*Djago 2* and *Pemandangan Islam*) [see *Overzicht van de Inlandsche...Pers* 1923: Nos. 45,50; 1924: Nos. 2, 6, 19], and that

Batuah and others turned the formerly modernist Sumatera Thawalib school in Padang Panjang into an important centre for the formulation of the ideology of Islamic communism.

It seems that communism owed its initial success to the spread of Islamic communism in highland villages, an ideology that served to articulate the increasingly radical grievances against colonial rule caused by the economic downswing of the period from 1920 to early 1924. Here, both the notion of increasing immiseration and of anti-colonialism resulted in a sharp increase in membership of the Sarekat Rakyat (SR), the communist affiliated 'people's unions', which were established in 1924 (see Table 1).

The aim of the Sarekat Rakyat was to enable fairly widespread recruitment outside the proletariat, as well as within it, while preserving the proletarian purity of the party itself. Throughout this period Padang Panjang remained the intellectual centre of the local party, the organizational centre (it was in several instances the location of the residency centres of both the PKI and the Sarekat Rakyat), as well as being among the largest branches.

An examination of these membership figures suggests several things about the social character of the communist movement in this first period of expansion. First, the movement attracted adherents in those few places where there was a relatively large working class, mostly employees of state enterprises. Hence the core of the Sawah Lunto SR was the PKTB, the union of workers in the state-owned Ombilin coal mines; in Kacang it was the railway workers, members of the VSTP, who worked in the Solok rail depot; and in Solok many SR members were low level employees

9) Again, however, not too much should be attributed to individual influence. Both were arrested and exiled in late 1923, and yet this was to prove no obstacle to the PKI's success in the following years.

and labourers in the Public Works Department. PKI membership also grew in Padang and in the port of Emmahaven among dockworkers. Muara Labuh was the site of a number of Dutch-owned plantations, and the estate workers, many of them Javanese, remained important party members and supporters even after the uprising [MR 1928/741x, 881x, 1173x].

The support of such workers for a radical anti-Dutch proletarian party is not in any way surprising. At the same time a number of smaller SR branches existed in areas where a proletariat was almost non-existent. Kota Lawas, Sungai Sarik, Silungkang, Payakumbuh, Fort de Kock, Fort van der Capellen, and Lubuk Basung are all centres of more apparently traditional peasant economy, most of them market centres for surrounding villages where rice is grown on small plots of land, and where cash income is earned through petty trade and crafts. In spite of this marked success, by late 1924 the communist movement was again in crisis. As Schrieke [1955] has pointed out, much support was lost in the economic upswing that started in late 1924. The economic immiseration thesis had begun to lose its appeal as prices rose and a second commodity boom got under way [see also OKI 1977].

This crisis was reflected within the party. In line with a decision by the Central Committee in Java, the Sarekat Rakyat were disbanded in February 1925 in order that the party might pursue a purer proletarian line. In West Sumatra it was decided that SR members would be permitted to join local party branches on the condition that they agreed to follow courses in the principles of communism. Accordingly, by June 1925 there were subsections of the PKI in existence in Padang, Padang Panjang, Fort van der Capellen, Solok, Sawah Lunto, Fort de Kock, and Payakumbuh, that is to say in all the major district (*afdeeling*) capitals.

The courses, however, met with little success; the fairly standard communist teachings were aimed largely at the proletariat. 'The slogan of class struggle found little response among the lower middle class of farmers and traders...' [SCHRIEKE 1955: 88]. 'By the end of 1925 the movement had as good as faded out everywhere on the West Coast...' [SCHRIEKE 1955: 88].

The PKI in 1925 seemed to be on the wane in West Sumatra, therefore, for a number of reasons. First, the economic upswing of late 1924 caused it to lose some of its peasant support. Secondly, the national decision to purify the party of 'petty bourgeois' elements led to the disbanding of the Sarekat Rakyat, and to a party line which was less likely to appeal to peasants and petty traders. Thirdly, it must not be forgotten that from the end of 1923 a high degree of political repression existed in West Sumatra (as indeed throughout Indonesia). Party leaders were arrested; restrictions on political gatherings were enacted and enforced; the movement was increasingly infiltrated by government spies; and anti-communist organizations were given full reign,¹⁰⁾ a fact which is obviously underplayed in the colonial documenta-

10) Islamic modernists, foremost among them Hadji Rasul (Batuah's teacher), were the first to engage in the struggle [*Collectie Kern* Nos. 144, 145, 148]. Later on, groups of *adat* leaders, the *panghulu*, organized campaigns against the communists [SCHRIEKE 1955:

tion and hence, unfortunately, also in the writings of scholars who must rely on the archives of the Ministry of Colonies for their source material.

THE RESURGENCE OF THE PKI FROM LATE 1925

Towards the end of 1925, however, support again began to increase; this time extremely rapidly. Schrieke [1955] is less detailed in his discussions of this resurgence of the communist movement, attributing it largely to terrorist tactics, and a total disregard for communist orthodoxy. He argues that from the end of 1925, the PKI was again willing to abandon its strict proletarian discipline in order to achieve a rapid mobilization in preparation for revolution. As a result, he maintains, communists were willing to pander to almost any local grievance and to use any means, including coercion, to increase party membership.

While political reports for this period, and the findings of the Commission [GINKEL *et al.* 1928] are less than clear on this point, it appears that one of the main areas of expansion in 1926 was the region I have called the Southern Frontier (the fringe area in the southern part of the residency) which at the time was part of the following districts (*afdeelingen*) and sub-districts (*onderafdeelingen*): Afdeeling Tanah Datar (Onderafdeeling Sijunjung), and Afdeeling Solok (Onderafdeelingen: Solok, Sawah Lunto, Alahan Panjang and Muara Labuh). In these districts, the following villages seem to have had communist supporters: Sijunjung, Tanjung Ampalu (especially Kampung III Tumpuk), the town of Sawah Lunto, Talawi, Silungkang, Padang Sibusuk, Muara Kelaban, Kubang, Batu Manjular, Sijantan, Bukit Kajik, Rumbio, Sungai Lasi, Pianggu, Alahan Panjang, Kota Gedang, Supayang, Air Luo, Tanjung Balit, Gerabak Datar, Kota Anau, Surian, Lolo, Muara Labuh, and plantations at Bukit Simpang, Tambaran, Batu Singir, Timbulan, Kayu Aro and Huberta.¹¹⁾

Information on the precise nature of the communist appeals, and of course on the nature of peasant consciousness in these regions, is, if anything, more difficult to come by than for the earlier period. As we have pointed out, Schrieke argues that the overall criticism of *kafir* capitalism (*kafir*: an offensive term for non-Muslim, infidel) was used in this period to explain the underlying causes of most local grievances. Schrieke [1955: 16] cites the central role played by the notion of *kemerdekaan*

159]. The arrests of Hadji Datuk Batuah, Natar Zainudin and Margas are discussed by Kern. Lower-level leaders and ordinary members of the party were often arrested and then released several times [see for example the records of interrogation in MR 1928, Nos. 740x, 761x, 802x, 809x]. Schrieke clearly plays down the repressive role of the state in his attempt to depict the communists as the terrorists. If this bias is clear in the writings of the contributors to the Westkust Rapport, it is even stronger in the writings and reports of most colonial administrators of the time—a fact which makes the user of Dutch archival sources very wary of relying too heavily on the opinions and analyses offered therein.

11) I have compiled this list—which must remain tentative due to the less than comprehensive nature of the sources—from a number of places. First, there are the Political Reports on West Sumatra from 1927 and 1928 [MR 1927/711x, 849x, 1143x; MR 1928/741x,

(freedom, independence) in all communist appeals of the time. In Sawah Lunto, communists argued therefore that the state-owned Ombilin coal mines should be given to the people; and elsewhere they argued against the granting of concessions to foreign mining concerns. Thus Islam and nationalism were usually seen to be directly thwarted by capitalism, and the bourgeoisie was defined almost solely in ethnic terms. The capitalists were the Dutch, and the single defining feature of the Dutch was that they were non-Muslims.

Schrieke, naturally, considered this view to be unreasonable; and it is his total rejection of this cornerstone of communist theory in West Sumatra that leads to his own analysis. I want, therefore, to turn briefly to existing explanations of the success of the PKI in West Sumatra, before showing how they are largely invalidated in the light of the socio-economic history of the Southern Frontier in the 1920s.

EXISTING EXPLANATIONS OF THE SUCCESS OF THE PKI IN WEST SUMATRA

At the risk of overgeneralization, it can be said that existing explanations for PKI successes in West Sumatra in the period from 1923 to the end of 1928—and indeed for the success of the PKI in other parts of Indonesia in the 1920s—in recruiting members, sympathizers in affiliated organizations, and unaffiliated supporters from outside the proletariat, are that they had less to do with communist ideology *per se* than with the ability of the party organization (through fair means and foul) to mobilize a wide range of peasants, merchants and small businessmen around localized grievances, and on a relatively *ad hoc* basis. It seems to be generally accepted that the transformations of the social and economic structure of the colony which followed the dismantling of the Culture System (literally the Cultivation System, of forced labour and forced deliveries, instituted by the Dutch in 1830), did indeed produce genuine grievances in some cases. The most frequently cited difficulties are narrowly economic ones, specifically the periods of economic recession which were part of the colonial trade cycles in the first decades of this century.¹²⁾ At the same time, most

881x, 1173x]. Secondly, there are the reports compiled by outgoing government officials, known as *Memorie van Overgave* (henceforth MvO). Here, those of van Heuven, first for his period of Assistant Resident in Sawah Lunto (1927–1929) [MvO Afkomstig van het KIT No. 304] and then as Governor [MR 1935/254] have been the most useful. Thirdly, I have used the collection of Sumatran newspaper articles collected by Damsté which forms part of his personal collection stored in Leiden at the Library of the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde [*Collectie Damsté* No. 53]. Finally, some use has been made of the admittedly rather vague hints of PKI involvement contained in the series of village monographs collected in the 1930s by colonial officials (assisted by the Leiden scholars) and stored in the Korn collection at the KIT (especially No. 327 which includes the available monographs for Muara Labuh).

12) McVey [1965], for example, in her extremely scholarly history of Indonesian Communism in its early stages, links the rise and fall in PKI recruitment almost entirely to changes in economic conditions.

analyses also link the success of the PKI to the more general phenomenon of what sociologists of development term 'modernization', a process which is thought to follow commercialization, in unilinear fashion. According to this view, Indonesian society (or, better, societies) can best be described as 'traditional' in the period before about 1870. The population is assumed to have been predominantly rural, agricultural, subsistence oriented, and dominated by various forms of extended kinship organization. Only with the transformations of the latter half of the nineteenth century in Java, and somewhat later in the Outer Islands, did these 'traditional' societies begin to break down under the primary impetus of the 'penetration of the money economy', which in turn produced a range of social side-effects.

In this 'transitional' period, therefore, Indonesians found themselves in the midst of a kind of economic and social revolution (quite clearly, to them, caused by the Dutch rulers themselves), and were, as a result, alienated from their past, with no clear understanding of their future. As a result it is not surprising that this transitional period was marked by political turbulence, a manifestation of the alienation of traditional peasants, and the new possibilities for political organization on a national scale permitted by the Ethical System of colonial rule (the paternalistic policies instituted by the Dutch after the end of the Culture System). However, because traditional, primordial ties were not entirely broken in rural areas, Indonesians were still motivated by backward-looking political goals, and attempted to revive a perceived golden age through modern looking forms of political organization. Political movements in this period tend to be viewed largely as in some sense 'pre-modern', in that, particularly in the nature and goals of their mass base, they retain an important link with the past. Writers therefore speak of the turbulent conjuncture of the new and the old [for example SCHRIEKE 1955: 130ff.], the Great and Little Traditions [for example WILLIAMS 1982: 5ff.], the modern and the traditional etc., in which the former is represented by the party or the upper echelons of religious and social movements, and the latter by the peasant villager. The PKI movement of the 1920s is taken to be a clear example of such conjunctures, since for these analysts there is such a clear disjuncture between the nature of communist analyses and ideology, and the experience of the peasantry.

For those completely out of sympathy with the aims of the PKI, therefore, an explanation of the success of the PKI amounts to understanding how an unscrupulous leadership could mobilize an ignorant peasantry on a platform not in the interest of the latter. Schrieke, one of the best examples of such a writer, must of necessity describe the communists as 'the most criminal elements of society' [SCHRIEKE 1955: 94]. In similar vein Kern [*Collectie Kern* No. 145], the adviser on 'native affairs', describes those susceptible to communist propaganda as people with no position left in Minangkabau society, as strangers on the fringes of society, as people whose religious piety is obscured by an irrational hatred of the *kafir*, and as people who for one reason or another felt discontented. Even those whose antipathy to communism is not so marked have nonetheless tended to accept the notion that the success of

communism could be achieved only by somehow duping, or threatening, the rank and file [for example McVEY 1965: 304ff.].

McVey is led to this conclusion, as was Schrieke, by her views on social and economic conditions in Minangkabau in the 1920s, indeed she bases her analysis almost entirely on Schrieke's findings. The central part of this model is the view that Western capitalism was but very weakly developed in West Sumatra where neither large-scale proletarianization nor large factories or plantations had emerged. As a result, the analysis offered by the communists, which rested on the equation of capitalism with colonialism, was incorrect, *ergo* they must have mobilized peasants on other grounds.

This, I think, brings us to the central issue at stake. The 'modernization' view of peasant consciousness in Minangkabau in the 1920s is tied inextricably to the prevailing perception of socio-economic conditions. The Minangkabau are taken to be the case *par excellence* of a peasant society undergoing modernization from within, as an inevitable consequence of the penetration of a traditional economy by a money economy. Schrieke [1955: 124] describes the effects as a process of the 'break-up of primitive communism'. The 'traditional' economy and society are described thus:

The closed goods economy which formed the society's economic foundation guaranteed that the ricefields remained common family property, to which even the few goods a man acquired by his own effort during his lifetime were surrendered on his death... Since this society was in the main self-sufficing, it had little need of a medium of exchange. What its own economy did not provide could easily be supplied by primitive barter...

...Minangkabau society is composed of a number of territorial republics or *negeris*. The government of these *negeris* is formed according to tradition by councils of family chieftains. The family is based on a matriarchal system. Originally its social nature found its characteristic expression in the large *adat* house [SCHRIEKE 1955: 95].

The transformations were brought about, on the one hand by the imposition of a money tax which created a need for cash income, and on the other hand by the existence of a world market which provided a wealth of new opportunities for meeting that need. The response was a boom in peasant cultivation, first of rice, and then of cash crops for the market. This reorientation of the traditional communities towards the market then produced a series of social effects: the growth of wage labour, increasing flexibility in land tenure (increased land transactions through pawning, and even sale), and a growing individualism (a slackening of the family tie, an increase in nuclear as opposed to extended family households, the use of *hibah*-Muslim gift law-to change inheritance patterns).

Commercialization and the consequent social changes did, however, produce disruptions, a result of the sometimes dysharmonic coexistence of the old and the new [SCHRIEKE 1955: 130]. It was these disruptions which allowed the communists to mobilize support from disaffected groups. Inevitable conflicts arose between existing *adat* authority (supported by the colonial state), and the following groups whose

interests were not represented by, and even conflicted with, the government backed *panghulu*: merchants, the younger generation, intellectuals, school teachers, members of cash-earning professions (for example craftsmen and women, carpenters, barbers, horse cart drivers), as well as *panghulu* who were excluded from an effective role in the village councils (*negariraad*) formed under the local government reform of 1915.

In Schrieke's view, then, the PKI achieved its successes because West Sumatra in the 1920s was in the middle of a transition from tradition to modernity. The transition was instigated by the penetration of indigenous society by a money economy. The significant outside influences were first, the imposition of a head tax, and secondly, the link with world markets provided by the European presence. It might be noted that in this view the situation was held to be genuinely transitional, and it would not be long before the vestiges of the subsistence economy and traditional social order gave way to a fully modern, fully commercialized society. It is no doubt this thesis which leads other writers to consider the communist movement as the last traditional protest in Minangkabau, rather than the first truly modern political movement.¹³⁾

This is not the place for a detailed critique of modernization theory as it has been used in Indonesia. However, a number of points might be made before showing how the picture of a transitional economy and society painted by Schrieke is in many ways totally at odds with the real developments in the Southern Frontier in the 1920s.

First, Schrieke's picture of a traditional Minangkabau economy and society is a highly misleading one (for a more detailed discussion of this, see Kahn [1980a]). The economy of Minangkabau has in one way or another been linked to European markets from probably the early sixteenth century, certainly from the early seventeenth century. Moreover, there is considerable evidence of high levels of commercialization from long before the coming of the Portuguese and then the Dutch and English merchants. There was certainly a high degree of commercial involvement by Minangkabau peasants in the nineteenth century,¹⁴⁾ although in my view the policies associated with the system of forced deliveries of coffee served to dampen down an

13) This is the view of a whole range of scholars apart from Schrieke. Taufik Abdullah [1967, 1971], for example, seems to trace modern political activity to the Muslim modernist movement, which really came into its own after the suppression of communism. Tichelman [1980], in a recent study of the social roots of Indonesian communism, suggests that politics in the 1920s had more in common with the millenarian movements of the nineteenth century than with the modern struggles of the Revolutionary and post-Independence periods. Michael Williams is more cautious on this point, but appears to favour the traditionalist label for the PKI in Banten when he writes: '...this was not a clearcut movement towards modern secular politics. Rather it was a process whereby these modern political forces which had arrived on the scene adapted themselves to the concrete realities of the local situation' [WILLIAMS 1982: 4].

14) See, for example, Dobbins [1977], for a discussion of the importance of commercialization for an understanding of the Padri movement; Benda-Beckmann [1979: 287ff.] and Kato [1982] for a discussion of the late nineteenth-century commodity boom in West Sumatra.

already highly developed commercial sector of the peasant economy.¹⁵⁾ Indeed, one could go so far as to suggest that rather than being an accurate picture of pre-colonial Minangkabau, Schrieke's analysis is more relevant to the Minangkabau village of the nineteenth century, but with the important exception that it leaves out both the colonial government and the coffee deliveries.

Secondly, the unilineal view of commercial evolution is highly suspect on theoretical grounds. There is no reason to suppose that the imposition of a money tax, by establishing the need for a cash income, would have led to continually increasing levels of monetization, even assuming that needs for a cash income were minimal before 1908. On the contrary, the tax can explain only a set level of monetization: the level necessary for peasants to pay the tax. It is incorrect to assume that this initial stage is simply transitional in an inevitable evolution to a fully monetized economy, an evolution generated by the market principle itself.¹⁶⁾

Thirdly, as Oki [1977] points out, Schrieke's account over-generalizes the model of the typical Minangkabau village, and uses it to explain developments in regions which differ significantly from the villages from which the model is derived. This is particularly the case for the Southern Frontier, where the traditional Minangkabau *nagari* was never typical, and by the 1920s had ceased to exist altogether.

Finally, the model almost totally ignores economic developments, in Minangkabau and elsewhere, which were taking place outside the local peasant economies, on the grounds that there were relatively few European-owned plantations or large-scale factories in the region. This assumption, echoed by Benda and McVey [1960], is almost sufficient by itself to explain the whole political analysis, since it is on this basis that writers have concluded that the ideological cornerstone of PKI analysis and teachings of the time (namely the equation of *kafir* with capitalist, and the reasoning that capitalism was the cause of the main grievances) was incorrect.

I want now to attempt to present another picture of the spread of communism in West Sumatra, by examining it in terms of social and economic change in a region which provided an important base for communist activities among the peasantry in the 1920s, the region I have termed the Southern Frontier.

THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER: 1900-1927

The region I have chosen to focus on in this analysis is an area in which PKI

15) Benda-Beckmann [1979] and Kato [1982] argue instead that monetization increased under the forced delivery system [see also KAHN 1980b].

16) The inherent teleology of such a thesis is nicely criticized by Dupré and Rey [1978]. I have dealt with this issue in the Indonesian and Malaysian context elsewhere [KAHN 1980a, 1982].

The empirical demonstration of this point is the contemporary situation in Minangkabau, where little further 'transition' has taken place since the 1920s. Oki [1977] even suggests that the capitalist transformation of Minangkabau peasant economy from within, was cut off by the depression of the 1930s, from which West Sumatra has never recovered.

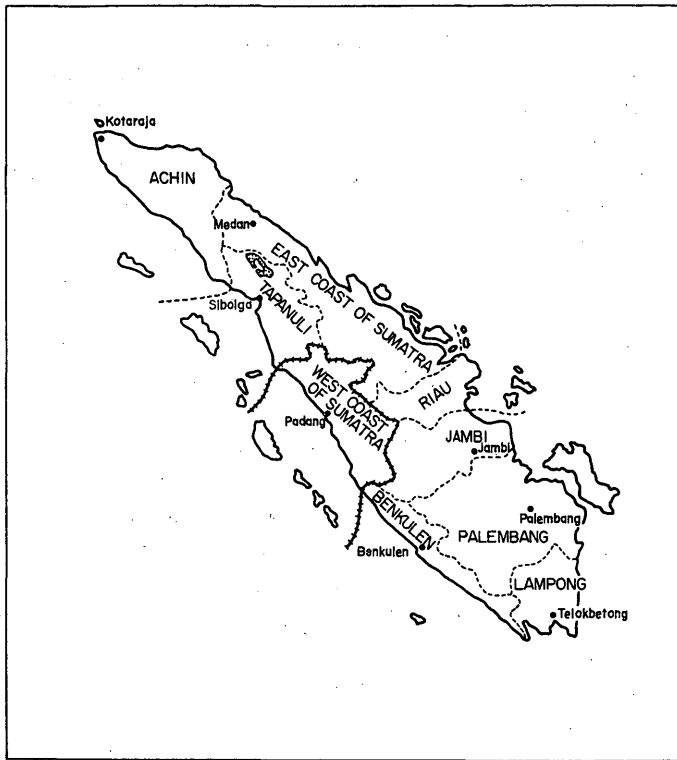


Figure 1. Sumatra: Showing the West Coast of Sumatra Residency
Source: Schrieke [1955: inserted inside back cover].

membership and support were relatively strong, and which seems to have been the main area for PKI recruitment and activity in the 1926 resurgence. The area I have chosen to call the Southern Frontier is a band of territory extending southeastwards from a line joining Sawah Lunto and Solok (see Figures 1 and 2). It includes some older Minangkabau villages in and around Sawah Lunto, Silungkang, Sijunjung and Kota Anau, as well as communities more typical of the outlying districts (*rantau*) in and around Muara Labuh. Many of these southern regions were incorporated into the structure of direct colonial rule only early in this century, while the more 'typical' Minangkabau villages had been incorporated during the nineteenth century. The *rantau* area is characterized by a sparser population and a relative poverty in irrigated rice land; and it was more heavily forested at the turn of the century than were the heartland districts (*darek*), namely the traditional Luhak of Agam (centred on Fort de Kock, now Bukit Tinggi), Limapuluh Kota (centred on Payakumbuh), and Tanah Datar (around Fort van der Capellen, now Batu Sangkar) (see Tables 2 and 3).

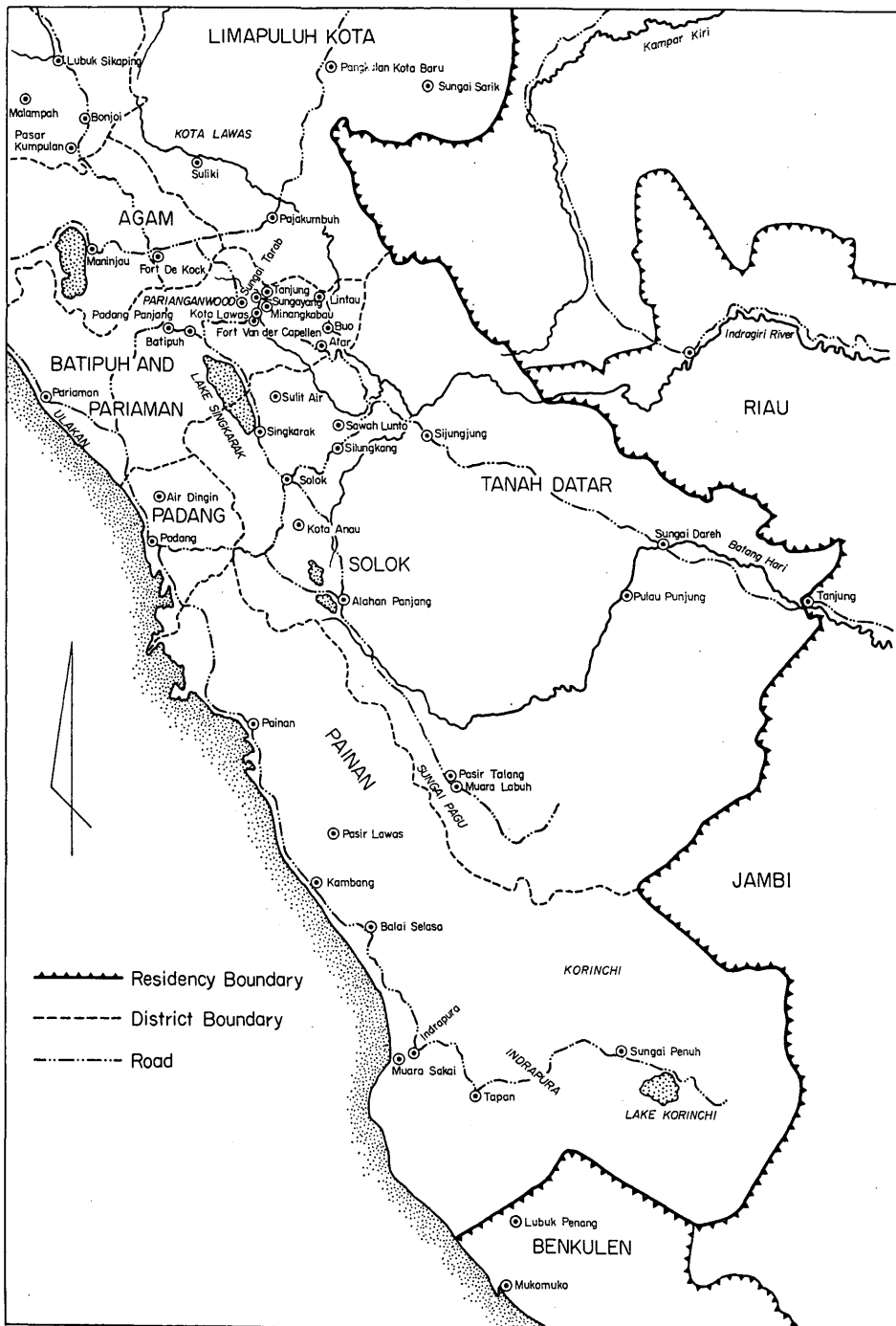


Figure 2. West Coast of Sumatra Residency
Source: Schrieke [1955: inserted inside back cover].

Table 2. Population: 'Southern Frontier' Region 1930

| Subdistrict (<i>Onderafdeeling</i>) | 'Native' | | European | | Chinese | | Other | | Total | | | | | | |
|--|----------|---------|----------|------|---------|-------|-------|--------|-------|------|--------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| | male | female | total | male | female | total | male | female | total | male | female | total | | | |
| Sawah Lunto | 23,341 | 19,638 | 42,979 | 311 | 256 | 567 | 455 | 197 | 652 | 20 | 8 | 28 | 24,127 | 20,099 | 44,226 |
| Solok | 60,365 | 62,564 | 122,929 | 43 | 30 | 73 | 138 | 79 | 217 | 27 | 28 | 55 | 60,573 | 62,701 | 123,274 |
| Muara Labuh | 27,149 | 24,042 | 51,191 | 78 | 49 | 127 | 267 | 60 | 327 | 1 | — | 1 | 27,495 | 24,151 | 51,646 |
| Alahan Panjang | 28,003 | 30,181 | 58,184 | 2 | 3 | 5 | — | — | — | — | — | — | 28,005 | 30,184 | 58,189 |
| Sijunjung* | 33,137 | 33,846 | 66,983 | 16 | 7 | 23 | 94 | 40 | 134 | — | — | — | 33,247 | 33,893 | 67,140 |
| Totals | 171,995 | 170,271 | 342,266 | 450 | 345 | 795 | 954 | 376 | 1,330 | 48 | 36 | 84 | 173,447 | 171,031 | 344,478 |

Source: MvO Afkomstig van het KIT [No. 257 dated ca. 1932].

* At the time of the census, Sijunjung was part of Afdeeling Tanah Datar, but was shortly thereafter transferred to Solok, and hence has been included in the totals here.

Table 3. Population Density: 'Southern Frontier' Region 1930

| District (<i>Afdeeling</i>) | Population | Area (km ²) | Population density (per km ²) |
|--|------------|-------------------------|---|
| Solok | 277,355 | 7547.40 | 36.75 |
| Subdistrict (<i>Onderafdeeling</i>) | | | |
| Solok | 123,274 | 1243.80 | 99.11 |
| Sawah Lunto | 44,226 | 403.20 | 109.69 |
| Alahan Panjang | 58,189 | 1886.40 | 30.85 |
| Muara Labuh | 51,646 | 4014.00 | 12.87 |
| Tanah Datar | 290,312 | 7336.80 | 39.57 |
| Subdistrict | | | |
| Sijunjung | 67,140 | 5974.20 | 11.24 |

Source: *Volkstelling 1930* [1933: Vol. 4].

Minangkabau Kinship and Village Structure

A number of monographs now exists which attempt to describe the social organizational aspects of Minangkabau *adat* [JOSSELIN DE JONG 1951; OKI 1977; BENDA-BECKMANN 1979; KAHN 1980a; KATO 1982]; hence it is unnecessary here to go over the arguments again. It is sufficient for present purposes to recall that in general Minangkabau villagers are members of matrilineal clans and lineages (*suku*); that *suku* are headed by chiefs (*panghulu*); that village communities (*nagari*) are composed of from four, to up to eight or nine clans; and that according to tradition these communities are governed by a council of *panghulu* who represent the different clans and lineages within the village. Each *nagari* is thought to adhere to one of two *adat* traditions, the one more hierarchical (*koto-piliang*), and the other more democratic (*bodi-caniago*).

Land for agriculture and houses is controlled by principles of what might be loosely termed communal ownership or rights (*hak ulayat*), vested usually either in the kin groups or in the village community as a whole. According to principles of *adat*, inheritance of land and houses passes within kin groups (usually from mother to daughter), or remains within the realm of communal rights (*ulayat*), depending largely on whether these rights have been exercised in the previous generation. Hence when village land has been worked with the permission of the appropriate people, it may then become *hak ulayat* of the lower level community (the *suku*), and in this way pass from a woman to her daughter, or from a man to his real or classificatory sister's son (*kamanakan*). However, for some time before the turn of this century, Islamic property laws have had some effect on property transfers. While today self-acquired property (*harto pancarian*) is said to be governed by Islamic inheritance law, this is apparently a relatively recent phenomenon [BENDA-BECKMANN 1979], although even in the late nineteenth century the Islamic law of gift (*hibah*) permitted someone with self-acquired property to pass it on to other than his or her

kamanakan, provided that such gifts were made before the death of the owner [KROESEN 1874].

Therefore, under *adat* regulations operating in the first few decades of this century, most land which was regularly worked and occupied was in individual possession, although its alienation was controlled by the *suku*; while remaining land (forest land, fallowed swidden, grass land etc.) was, at least in the eyes of most Minangkabau villagers, the communal property (*hak ulayat*) of village communities. With a very few exceptions, the Minangkabau view was that all land within the boundaries of the Minangkabau world was controlled by the principles of *hak ulayat* [KROON 1921]. The use of new or abandoned land was therefore usually subject to the granting of permission by the village as a whole, which meant that its allocation was controlled *de facto* by the members of the *nagari* council. Villagers who wished to cultivate *nagari* land, as well as others who wished to use it for cultivation, mining, the collection of forest products, or the grazing of cattle, were normally expected to obtain the permission of the council, and in many cases to give the village representatives a proportion of the products thus obtained, a payment which was known as the *bungo kayu* [KROON 1921].

Beyond this general survey, it becomes extremely difficult to generalize about village socio-economic organization, for two reasons. First, these general statements conceal great variation in practices in different parts of Minangkabau. These differences are only partly accounted for by the traditional distinctions between *darek* and *rantau*, and between hierarchical and egalitarian principles referred to earlier.¹⁷⁾ Generalization is further complicated by the fact that from the earliest years of Dutch direct rule in the highlands, *adat* organization was used in different ways by the colonial state as an instrument of colonial rule. As a result of changes in the *function* of Minangkabau *adat*—particularly its changing function in colonial policies—one must be extremely wary of analyses that do not treat the historical context [KAHN 1976; BENDA-BECKMANN 1979].

The very large range of variation in space of *adat* in practice is evident, for example, in the descriptions contained in the so-called *nagari* monographs collected by the Dutch in the early 1930s [*Collectie Korn* No. 367]. This is compounded in regions like Muara Labuh, where some of the villages had been subjected to colonial rule relatively recently, and as a result still showed traces of a more developed local hierarchy which one suspects may have been more prevalent elsewhere in pre-colonial Minangkabau [*Collectie Korn* No. 367]. In such regions some villages were governed by the whole of the *panghulu andiko* (lineage heads), others mostly by clan heads (*panghulu suku* or *panghulu pucuak*), others by the descendants of local territorial chiefs (*raja* and *orang basa*), and others by some combination of these. In most cases, the communal rights (*hak ulayat*) to so-called waste ground were, at the time of the surveys, vested in the village as a whole; but several monographs describe a relatively recent situation (in areas brought under colonial rule after 1900), where

17) Oki [1977] discusses the crucial significance of variations for an analysis of social change in this period.

these rights were vested in the person of the territorial chief(s) alone. In most cases, the use of these lands for the collection of forest products, for use or sale, are subject to payments of *bungo kayu* (usually 10%). However, the recipient of the *bungo kayu* varies: sometimes the *nagari kas* or fund, sometimes all *panghulu*, sometimes *panghulu suku*, and even sometimes just the *raja*. There also cases where no payment of *bungo kayu* is required at all.¹⁸⁾

One must be wary of assuming that this discussion of *adat*, if further refined, would give us a total picture of Minangkabau economy and society on the Southern Frontier at the turn of the century. First, some parts of the region were controlled by the Dutch in the nineteenth century, and this had important implications for the structure of *nagari* government, for the power of the *panghulus*, and, of course, for the local economy. Commercial restrictions and forced coffee deliveries may in some cases have been evaded, but they were nonetheless an important aspect of the economy as late as 1900.

Secondly, the picture painted above is extremely inaccurate in that it leaves the *commercial* sector of the economy largely untouched. Further research is necessary here, but it is not unreasonable to assume that in spite of restrictions on commerce in the nineteenth century, peasants in these areas planted cash crops, traded in forest products, bred cattle and exported hides, and travelled extensively as merchants. The detailed provisions on the subject of *bungo kayu* and of various *adat* levies on merchants, mining and other enterprises, also suggest the presence of an active commodity economy before 1900. And if Dutch policies in the nineteenth century actually served to depress this commodity economy, one would expect a very different picture for the period before 1847 [DOBBINS 1983]. In particular it is clear that villages like Silungkang and Kota Anau, to name the two best known, had long been commercial centres, where merchants from surrounding regions and other parts of Minangkabau came and went, and which served as distribution points for locally produced food-stuffs, animal products, forest products and the products of craftwork, as well as points of import for goods produced elsewhere. Yet the *nagari* monographs make no mention of the provision for the acceptance of outsiders as temporary or permanent immigrants, whereas, as we shall see, at least by the 1920s, and quite probably much before that, immigrants came predominantly from other parts of Minangkabau to the *rantau* to engage in trade, craftwork, the collection of forest products and even in agriculture. Most temporary migrants and merchants could find accommodation in local and regional market villages, while those coming to engage in more settled agriculture could attach themselves to existing villages and clans through a process sometimes known as *malakok*. The *nagari* histories provide material on the origins of first settlers, but contain almost nothing on more recent immigrants to the area.

18) The unhelpfulness of the *bodi-caniago*: *koto-piliang* distinction is evident here. Sometimes villages are said to be 'mixed'; more often the *rajas*, *orang basa* and *panghulu suku* are said to follow *koto-piliang*, and the rest of the villagers *bodi-caniago*!

Local Economic Changes from 1908

We come now to a more concrete discussion of the local economy in the period after the imposition of a money tax in 1908.¹⁹⁾ If we examine aggregate data on the economy of the indigenous people in the districts included in the Southern Frontier, then the region does not seem to differ significantly from the rest of Minangkabau. Or, more accurately, it can be said that the kinds and range of variation found in the Southern Frontier are also manifest elsewhere. Hence, many peasant villagers were engaged in the cultivation of rice on wet lands (*sawah*), although there is perhaps more dry land (*ladang*) rice cultivation than was found in the heartland.

Systematic data on yields and per capita landholdings are not available for the region as a whole. However, a rough impression of variation can be obtained from the sources (see note 19). In Muara Labuh as a whole there were in 1923 roughly 8,000 *bouw* (1 *bouw*=0.72 ha, hence 5,760 ha) of *sawah*, and the average *sawah* holdings were estimated at 1.285 ha per capita. The area was considered to be very suitable for rice cultivation, and average yields were around 31 piculs per *bouw* (1 picul=61.7 kg). Rice was also the main crop on some 12,000 *bouw* of dry land, with a yield of 30 piculs per *bouw* on average. The price of rice in the Muara Labuh market ranged from 13.50 to 15 guilders per piculs of hulled rice (*beras*) [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 152ff.].

In the subdistrict of Sawah Lunto, in the early 1930s, there were 5,972 *bouw* of *sawah* (4,240 ha), which gives an average per capita holding of only 0.14 *bouw* (0.10 ha), although of course a large part of the district population lived in the town itself. Even excluding the population of the town, this gives a per capita holding of only 0.17 ha [Collectie Korn No. 367]. The land is said to have been less suitable for *sawah* cultivation, hence yields were presumably lower than in Muara Labuh [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 162]. Sijunjung was also relatively poor in *sawah*, yields averaged 25 piculs per *bouw*, and average per capita holdings only some 0.12 *bouw* [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 161ff.]. Yields in Alahan Panjang were higher (36 piculs per *bouw*) in the villages of Kota Gedang, Kota Lawas, Batu Banjak, Limau Lunggo, Sirukam, Supajang and Air Dingin, where per capita *sawah* holdings were relatively good [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 164]. However the region in general was not well off in *sawah* and yields were low in the higher lying villages [SCHRIEKE 1955: 101ff.].

Throughout the region, villagers also planted other food crops and cash crops

19) This section summarizes research still in progress, and hence is necessarily sketchy. There are three major sources for the analysis. First, there is the economic section of the Westkust Rapport [GINKEL *et al.* 1928]. Secondly, there are the much better documents (most of which data from the early 1930s) collected by Korn as part of a proposed economic monograph on the region. This is an extraordinarily rich collection, and we shall here be able only to skim its surface [Collectie Korn No. 367]. Finally, there are materials in various Memorie van Overgave (MvO) for the Residency as a whole and also from local officials. The latter, unfortunately, were often heavily censored. They are in the collection originally stored in the Koninklijk Instituut in Amsterdam and now moved to the Rijksarchief in The Hague (they are here referred to as MvO KIT).

for the world market. Muara Labuh, in spite of its relatively good position in terms of *sawah* (it had been a rice surplus area), from 1925 began to import rice from Alahan Panjang and focus on coffee cultivation. Rice imports amounted to some 41,000 piculs in 1925, and coffee exports were around 6,000 piculs in the same year [SCHRIEKE 1955: 101]. Indeed Schrieke described this period (of the second commodity boom which started in late 1924) as a period of coffee madness in Muara Labuh: children were kept home from school and people were interested only in coffee cultivation. In 1923 there were approximately 2,000 *bouw* of coffee land, of which 1,500 *bouw* were in cultivation (this presumably increased in 1924). The average yield was about 10 piculs of coffee per *bouw*, and the average per capita holding 0.384 ha [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 152ff.].

In Sijunjung villagers cultivated rubber on dry land, where the average yield was 4 piculs per *bouw* [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 162]. Rubber, coffee, sugarcane, yams, maize, tobacco and bananas were also cultivated in Alahan Panjang for the market [SCHRIEKE 1955: 101ff.; *Collectie Korn* No. 367]. The Westkust Rapport data [GINKEL *et al.* 1928] in fact show that cash crops for the local and regional market were more important in Alahan Panjang than in Muara Labuh. In the former 47.9% of income was derived from the cultivation of food crops, compared with only 14.3% from export crops. The figures for Muara Labuh are 23.8% and 29.4% respectively [GINKEL *et al.* 1928: 48].

The peasants' need for a cash income was also met in other ways. In an interesting document, Korn [*Collectie Korn* No. 367] provides detailed income data for the following occupations in Sawah Lunto in the early 1930s: cultivation and trade in coffee, rice, maize, groundnuts, gambir, and fruit (durian, mangosteen); livestock raising (buffalo, cattle, goats, ducks and chickens); the production of horse and buffalo carts; driver of horse cart, buffalo cart, and bus; owner of coffee shop and foodstall; blacksmith, tailor, laundryman, painter, carpenter, and cobbler. Livestock was also reared for sale in the villages of Alahan Panjang, Muara Labuh and Sijunjung. All the historical sources discuss the importance of petty trade and small commodity production as sources of income in the smaller market towns of outlying districts. Throughout the region, therefore, there were villages in which weekly markets were held, and where there were concentrations of petty traders, smiths, carpenters, masons, and other craftspeople. In Sawah Lunto these market centres were found in Silungkang, Padang Sibusuk, Pamuatan, Muara Bodi, Talawi, Sijantang and Kolok. Silungkang, of course, was also the site of the cottage weaving industry [OKI 1980]. In Alahan Panjang the market centres were in the town itself, and in the villages of Sungei Nanam, Talang Berbungo, Sarik Alahan III, Air Ampuh (Air Dingin), Simpang (Tanjung nan IV), Bukit Sileh, Kota Anau and Kubang nan II. In Muara Labuh markets were found in the town itself, and in the villages of Lolo, Surian, Pasir Talang, Kota Baru, Lubuk Gedang, Lubuk Malako, Bidar Alam and Abai [*Collectie Korn* No. 367]. In Sijunjung, certainly the town and Padang Sibusuk were sites of local markets.

Finally a cash income could be earned in wage labour. In Muara Labuh some

Table 4. Income Distribution: 'Southern Frontier' Region 1927 (in %)

| <i>Onderafdeeling</i> | Income (in guilders) | | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------|---------|-----------|-------------|--------|
| | 120-300 | 300-600 | 600-1,000 | 1,000-2,400 | 2,400+ |
| Sawah Lunto | 45.3 | 50.1 | 2.5 | 1.2 | 0.2 |
| Sijunjung | 57.2 | 38.3 | 2.5 | 1.8 | 0.2 |
| Alahan Panjang | 88.2 | 10.4 | 1.1 | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| Muara Labuh | 66.9 | 24.5 | 6.3 | 2.0 | 0.3 |
| Sumatra (West Coast) | 72.2 | 22.4 | 3.7 | 1.5 | 0.2 |

Source: Ginkel *et al.* [1928].

villagers worked as 'free' labourers on nearby European plantations. In Muara Labuh and Alahan Panjang there was also some use of wage labour in village agriculture, as well as sharecropping and sharetapping arrangements. However, it seems that there was not a significant amount of wage labour within the peasant economy itself, since, for example, in periods of expansion an acute labour shortage was felt in the smallholder cash crop sector.

There is also some considerable variation in income in the region. The average annual taxable income per family member in the family samples of the Commissie van Onderzoek [GINKEL *et al.* 1928] in 1927 was 51.39 guilders in Alahan Panjang and 167.33 guilders in Muara Labuh. Table 4 shows income distribution, calculated from the data used for taxation. Finally the Westkust report included some data on occupational and class structure for the sample areas which include Alahan Panjang and Muara Labuh. These data are summarized in Table 5.

The brief economic ethnography of the region presented above, as I have pointed out, presents a picture of the economy of the Southern Frontier which does not differ markedly from the rest of West Sumatra.²⁰⁾ Most villagers are engaged in both subsistence activities and in a range of cash earning activities. Men and women cultivate rice on ancestral land for family subsistence and earn a cash income from petty trade, small commodity production, and cash cropping for local, regional and international markets. Disparities in income do exist, and yet they are not marked within the peasant economy itself. These disparities are related to what might be called micro-class position. Some peasants hire out their labour; other peasants are hirers of wage labour. A smaller proportion of families without access to ancestral land cultivate rice on a sharecropping basis. And yet the majority of peasants are members of individual or family 'enterprises' which employ no wage labour, and for which the individual and/or the family members supply the labour. There has been remarkably little long-term change in this picture in the almost 50 years since the research was carried out by the Commissie van Onderzoek [GINKEL *et al.* 1928].

20) Nor is the picture much different today. In terms of occupational and class structure there are remarkable similarities with the Minangkabau village economy of the early 1970s (compare especially Table 5, with Tables 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 in Kahn [1980a]).

Table 5. Occupation and Class Structure for Sample of Adult Men

| <i>Afdeeling</i> | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Total |
|-----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Padang | 21 | 3 | 32 | 12 | 45 | 287 | 851 | 62 | 101 | 63 | 124 | 62 | 68 | 48 | 1,832 | 3,328 | 6,909 |
| Oud-Agam | 6 | 4 | 48 | 21 | 340 | 561 | 524 | 1 | 14 | 147 | 455 | 12 | 4 | 24 | 388 | 274 | 2,823 |
| Alahan Panjang | 7 | 3 | 21 | — | 38 | 352 | 212 | 9 | 184 | 81 | 206 | 10 | 296 | — | 38 | 141 | 1,598 |
| Muara Labuh | 6 | 2 | 40 | 37 | 4 | 1,450 | 385 | 18 | 99 | 307 | 40 | — | 565 | 15 | 43 | 272 | 3,283 |
| Sumatra (West Coast) (%) | 0.36 | 0.16 | 1.39 | 0.30 | 2.53 | 25.02 | 17.12 | 0.90 | 6.84 | 4.35 | 4.55 | 0.41 | 4.70 | 0.50 | 11.01 | 9.81 | 100 |

Source: Ginkel *et al.* [1928: 21].

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| A | Government official | I | Middle-level farmer of export crops |
| B | Village head or member of village government | J | Poor farmer of export crops |
| C | Religious official or teacher | K | Landless sharecropper — food crops |
| D | Wage worker for non-Indonesian plantation | L | Landless sharecropper — export crops |
| E | Well-off farmer of food crops | M | Wage labourers in 'native' agriculture |
| F | Middle-level farmer of food crops | N | Well-off craftsman, big trader — employing labour |
| G | Poor farmer of food crops | O | Small trader and craftsman — working alone |
| H | Well-off farmer of export crops | P | Free labourers |

The small amounts of wage labour within peasant agriculture have not increased significantly.

It is important, in conclusion, to offer some remarks on the organization of the commercial sector. First, it should be noted that no clear-cut distinction can be made between productive and distributive occupations. 'Small trader' is a label attached to a person who forms a link in a long chain that stretches from producer to consumer. Traders engage in some activities that might be described as productive, just as many producers and farmers play some role in the marketing of their products. The links in the chain are, more often than not, between entrepreneurs on an equal footing, whether they are 'traders' or 'producers'. These links are sometimes also kin links, but are almost always personal and non-hierarchical relations, usually oiled by the flows of small amounts of credit in one direction (usually from the productive to the distributive pole). The blurred boundaries between production and distribution are made even less distinct by the high degree of occupational mobility. While there may be a tendency for local occupational specialization, coffee farmers may become coffee traders, livestock herders may become butchers, carpenters may become timber merchants, or even collectors of wood, and so on.

Secondly, as we have said, there is some degree of differentiation among commercial enterprises. A few enterprises may hire wage labour in cultivation, craft production, shops etc.; many more are individually owned and operated; and some operate only on credit, or under the credit umbrella of a larger enterprise. There seems to be an association between position in the micro-class structure and access to property through the *suku* and village membership. Thus in 1971, I found that blacksmiths who employed wage labour were more likely to have access to more *sawah pusako* than individual entrepreneurs who were, in turn, likely to have more *sawah* than wage labourers. The reasons for this are clear. The more that family and enterprise reproduction can be carried on outside the commodity circuits, the more cash an entrepreneur will have to circulate as capital in his or her commodity enterprise. Hence rice which is cultivated on family land is free (has no money cost). This increases the potential cash flow of the enterprise. This also holds true for access to means of production. Smiths, for example, previously used charcoal in forging. If that charcoal could be obtained from forest under the control of the *nagari*, greater money rates of profit could be achieved than if the smith had to purchase charcoal or coal in the market. This can be extended by looking at the supply of land for cash cropping, for the rearing of livestock, and access to the forest for the supply of wood for the timber merchant or carpenter, rattan for the manufacturer or seller of rattan products, reeds for the matmaker, etc. In other words the small commodity producer/trader has an interest in maintaining access to those products (means of production, food for family consumption) which he or she can obtain *outside* the market, and will avoid purchasing consumption goods and means of production if at all possible.

European Economic Influence on the Southern Frontier

In the previous discussion of *adat* and economy in the Southern Frontier region of Minangkabau we have noted that, except for the variation that existed everywhere in the residency at the time, the Southern Frontier did not differ significantly from other regions. Nor, on the basis of the material presented so far on the Indonesian economy and society of the region, do we yet have any reason to doubt the prevailing explanations of economic change and political consciousness offered by Schrieke and others. Moreover, there was no significant internal class differentiation of the peasant economy, or at least not enough to explain the existence of class struggle *within* the peasant community. Indeed an explanation based on significant internal class differentiation could not explain why the predominant ideology among communist supporters in the region was couched largely in ethnic terms, namely the equation of capitalism with colonialism and hence with the Dutch, and the perception of the struggle as one between true believers and *kafir*.

Unfortunately, all previous accounts of economic change in the first few decades of this century, and explanations of the spread of the PKI, have failed to take fully into account the role of the colonial state in the shaping of the local economy. As we shall see, especially in the Southern Frontier, vast tracts of land, alienated in various ways by the colonial state itself, were made virtually off-limits for local entrepreneurs. While few Minangkabau villagers were directly proletarianized by this form of 'enclosure', the effects must have been momentous for the local economy, depriving villagers and immigrants alike of access to land for cultivation and livestock grazing, and access to the forest for the collection of timber for sale and of a series of commodities, collectively termed forest products, which had for centuries been the mainstay of the Minangkabau commercial economy.

There are several reasons why various observers have failed to take this process into account. First, Schrieke clearly felt that capitalist enterprises in the region could only have good effects, by bringing wealth and employment to previously under-developed regions. Thus he is blind to the adverse effects of these developments. As Oki [1977] shows, Schrieke based his model of Minangkabau society of the time on regions in which this development was relatively insignificant, even though the areas of greatest PKI support included the Southern Frontier, where land alienation by the colonial state was a very significant aspect of the history of the region.

Secondly, observers have been misled by the lack of a European-employed proletariat in the region (see Table 5) into assuming that alienation of land for estates and mining exploration must have been of little significance. This oversight is compounded by the fact that even in the 1920s, and certainly by the time of the depression, much of the land allocated to European enterprise was unused. This was due to the unsuitability of the region for plantation agriculture, and to the existence of a highly speculative land market, in which leases were granted to individuals and companies who had no intention of using the land for cultivation, but were interested only in making money on rising land values. For these and other reasons investigators have been misled by the remark made by Governor van Heuven to the effect

that the agrarian regulation in West Sumatra was a dead letter [MvO B.H.F. van Heuven in MR 1935/254].

Thirdly, Schrieke, and those who have relied on the Westkust Report, because they greatly underestimated the significance of the commercial economy in forest products and timber, were also led to the mistaken assumption that the rules of forest reservation had little effect on the Minangkabau population. They have argued this because in most cases forest reserves were kept open to those villagers who had traditional *hak ulayat* rights in the area of the reserves, and so would still be permitted to gather wood *for their own use*. While this may have preserved these specific rights, the regulations made illegal the commercial exploitation of the forests by Minangkabau.

In this paper I shall present only a brief summary of the wealth of materials that exist on this topic.

By means of new agrarian legislation originally passed in 1874 and continually revised thereafter, the colonial state in West Sumatra was deemed to be the ultimate owner of all 'waste' land, that is to say land not currently being used for occupation or cultivation. At the same time, the state was negotiating for the use of a large tract of land near Sawah Lunto for coal mining, and this concession was gradually expanded in the twentieth century. Apart from the alienation of 'waste' land, as well as rice fields (for which compensation was paid), for the Ombilin mines, the years after the turn of the century saw the granting of an increasing number of *erfpacht* (leases) for agriculture, almost entirely to Europeans. The granting of *erfpacht* had in fact begun in the Tanah Datar region in the nineteenth century; but by the twentieth century the tendency was to give *erfpacht* in the *rantau* or outlying districts, including the newly incorporated regions of Muara Labuh. Between 1877 and 1922 the government approved applications in Muara Labuh for the alienation of land (previously the *tanah ulayat* of village communities in the area) on *erfpacht* totalling 33,677 ha (a total of 34 separate leases). Of this land, only a small proportion was actually in cultivation by the 1930s [*Collectie Korn* No. 367], partly a result of the effects of the depression on European enterprises, and partly because some of the land had *never* been cultivated, but kept unused by land speculators [MvO LeFebvre in MR 1919/2904]. Such land as was in use, was cultivated largely by Javanese indentured labourers, although some estates also hired people from nearby Minangkabau villages in times of greatest labour needs.

While much of the land was not cultivated, and while according to the prevailing view Muara Labuh was a thinly populated region where there was plenty of land for all, the Governor of West Sumatra already observed in the late 1910s that there was insufficient land of good quality for the 'native' cultivation of cash crops because so much of the better land was tied up in *erfpacht* [MvO LeFebvre in MR 1919/2904: 57].

In Sawah Lunto, as we have already observed, the increase in the concession for the Ombilin mines was a continuous source of unrest, especially in nearby villages such as Talawi, where even today people still talk about the 'theft' of their land by Ombilin, with inadequate compensation.

Table 6. Land under Forest Reserve 1923 (in hectares)

| | Total area | Forested area | | | |
|--|-------------|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| | | total forested area | as % total area | forest reserve | as % total area |
| Solok | 717, 800 | 536, 900 | 75 | 429, 300 | 60 |
| Tanah Datar | 744, 100 | 562, 800 | 76 | 266, 400 | 36 |
| Sumatra (West Coast and Islands) | 4, 548, 400 | 3, 127, 300 | 69 | 1, 607, 000 | 35 |

Source: Dienst van het Boschwezen [1923].

In Alahan Panjang, where much less land was leased as *erfpacht*, a good deal of land was instead handed out to European firms for mining exploration. Although not totally off-limits for those villages which had *hak ulayat* in the concession area, there was considerable friction between villagers and immigrants over the allocation of land in this way [SCHRIEKE 1955]. In 1914 the only *erfpacht* in Alahan Panjang, totalling approximately 2,300 ha, was granted to a Dutch company. However, in the 1920s and early 1930s, 102,683 ha were granted in concession to European-owned mining firms.

Thus we may conclude that, in the period under consideration, European land ownership was a significant element in the Southern Frontier, all existing analyses to the contrary. Moreover, the aggregated figures given above in all likelihood underestimate the possible effect of the *erfpacht*, in that they do not show that usually the best land was given out to Western enterprises, and, at least in Muara Labuh, much of this land was quite close to the villages, since planters hoped to be able to recruit labour from nearby Malay settlements.

We have so far looked at grants of land made by the colonial state to private concerns. Far more land was 'taken out of circulation' through the policy of forest reservation, a policy which as early as the late 1910s was causing political friction in the heartland of Minangkabau. LeFebvre [SCHRIEKE 1955] discusses the potentially violent outburst of villagers living on the slopes of Mount Singgalang who, because of a newly created forest reserve, were prevented from planting vegetables and sugar-cane on the mountain slopes. As we have already noted, forest reservation was perhaps the main political issue in 1923, when opposition to the policies of the Forestry Service was one of the main motivation factors for the protest meetings led by Abdul Muis.

Throughout the 1920s increasing amounts of land were reserved, and made off-limits for peasant agriculture as well as for commercial exploitation. By 1924, for example, 75% of the forested area in Solok district was protected as forest reserve, an area that represented 60% of the total area of the district (see Table 6). Figure 3 also shows that a very substantial proportion of land in the Southern Frontier was reserved in this way.

Apart from the obstacles to the indigenous commodity economy created by the policy of forest reservation, the existence of forest reserves had other effects. While

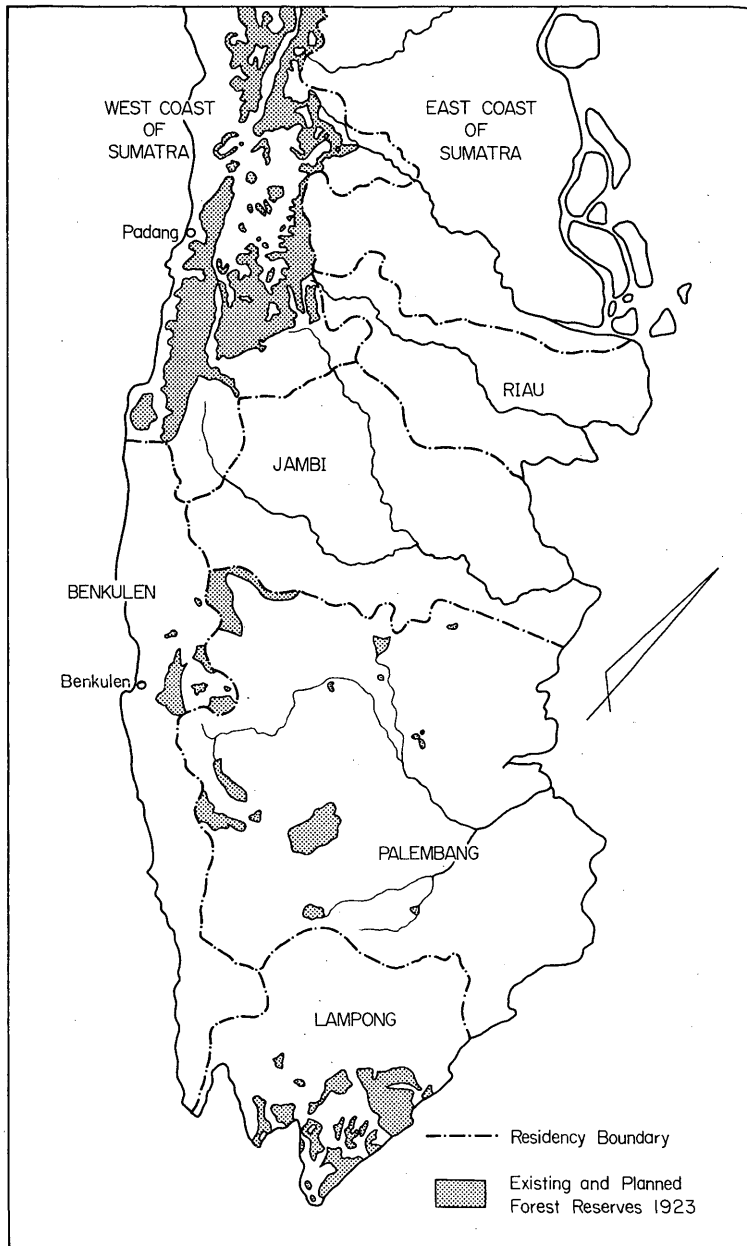


Figure 3. Existing and Planned Forest Reserves 1923

Source: Annual Report for 1923 of the Netherlands Indies Forestry Service, Bogor [DIENST VAN HET BOSCHWEZEN 1923].

ostensibly introduced for ecological reasons, the reservation of forests was not without commercial importance. There are numerous cases of the granting of concessions, by the Forestry Service, for the exploitation of timber and other forest products. This created conflicts, first, with the villages that exercised *hak ulayat* rights in the reserve areas; for by rights they should have become eligible for the traditional *bungo kayu* payments which we discussed earlier. In many cases, their requests for the payments were denied, up to the implementation of the so-called Solok Ruling in 1928, which attempted to compensate for this.²¹⁾ Secondly, the restrictions on the use of forests which prevented commercial exploitation by Minangkabau entrepreneurs were seen to be discriminatory when Europeans were granted concessions. The best known case is that of the use of the Sijunjung forest reserve, by a private contractor under licence from the Ombilin mines, for the collection of large amounts of timber for use in the mines themselves. There was a similar row in the Padang district, when the Indarung cement factory was permitted to exploit the nearby forest reserve as a source of timber for factory buildings and the housing of Indarung employees.²²⁾

This admittedly sketchy picture of the encroachment on Minangkabau land rights shows that, contrary to the impressions of most subsequent observers, the transformations in agrarian structure that followed the new agrarian land laws in West Sumatra were highly significant throughout West Sumatra, and particularly so in the Southern Frontier region.

CONCLUSION: THE PKI IN THE SOUTHERN FRONTIER REGION

We now have the data to explain why the PKI was able to gain so many supporters, mobilized against *kafir* capitalism in West Sumatra in the 1920s, and particularly for the rapid resurgence of the PKI in the Southern Frontier region in 1926. We are now able to make some concluding observations.

The effect of the agrarian transformation produced by the colonial state in this region was, first, to generate conflict between local villages and the state, a conflict over the *hak ulayat* of these communities and the payment of the *bungo kayu*. Of perhaps even greater significance, however, was the conflict between on the one side the class of petty traders, craftsmen and women, and cash cropping peasants described above, and on the other side the representatives of the colonial state.

Most of the villages and districts which have been mentioned here as being the centres of PKI activity in this period were large and small commercial centres, with economic links with the surrounding rural areas. The alienation and reservation of 'waste land' in these areas by the state served to cut off members of this class from access to land and forest in the surrounding countryside, and thus to force this com-

21) For a discussion of the regulations, and the difficulties faced by the Forestry Service in West Sumatra in enforcing them, see articles by Schnepfer [1922a, 1922b, 1923, 1925].

22) The Sijunjung reserve and local objections are discussed in numerous sources. See for example *Collectie Korn* [Nos. 352, 366] and the MvO of the Controleur of Sijunjung, Bruins, also in the Korn collection.

mercial class into increasing reliance on commodity circuits of productive and distributive inputs for their own reproduction. In short, the period marks a transition from a peasant economy to one in which petty commodity production is dominant [KAHN 1982]. At the same time these petty commodity producers were in the position of being able to observe directly the causes of this alienation: the Dutch colonial state itself acting the role of capitalist. It is no wonder, therefore, that the poorer of them were sympathetic to the analyses offered by the PKI. They corresponded directly to their own experience.

It might be added that this explanation of PKI resurgence is further supported by other facts. First, it is known that large numbers of PKI supporters who took part in the Silungkang uprisings were not native to Silungkang, but came from other parts of Sumatra. The data given by van Heuven [MvO B. H. F. van Heuven in MR 1935/254] on the origins of 109 people arrested for their role in the PKI in this period, show large numbers of people born in the central highlands of Minangkabau. Similarly, a reading of the short life-histories of those arrested, provided in the records of their interrogation, shows that most PKI supporters were geographically highly mobile, and that a very large proportion of them had spent some time in petty trade and small-scale agriculture in the Southern Frontier region itself. We know that Solok, Sawah Lunto, Alahan Panjang and Muara Labuh experienced rates of population growth between 1920 and 1930 which were among the highest in the province [*Volkstelling 1930 1933*: Table 6], and that large number of people in the 1930 census of Muara Labuh and Sawah Lunto originated from other parts of West Sumatra [*Volkstelling 1930 1933*: introductory chapter on migration]. This is another reason for the inadequacy of the Schrieke findings, since he and other members of the Commission attempted to explain PKI support almost entirely in terms of the social and economic structure of the *nagari*, hence missing altogether the dynamic commercial developments in and around the markets to which outsiders as well as local people came.

Finally, this explanation also shows why the PKI was able to gain support even in a period of apparent economic expansion in the region as a whole. For it was precisely in these periods that demand for land was greatest, both by foreign concerns and local people, and thus class conflict between the capitalist state and petty commodity producers was also greatest.

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Archival materials are inventorized (and hence cited in the text) according to the system employed by the Ministry of Colonies. The pieces sent from Indonesia back to the Netherlands were assigned an inventory number, the series of numbers beginning each year. These

pieces were called *mailrapporten* (abbreviated as MR). Hence the fifth *mailrapport* received in 1928 can be cited as MR 1928/5. Some *mailrapporten* were removed from this sequence, and stored with related documents in a separate series of *verbalen* (abbreviated V) (minutes). When this has happened, a reference is given to the *verbalen* series, inventorized similarly by year and number, for example V 1928/5.

Included in the *mailrapport* series are the so-called *Memorien van Overgave* (abbreviated as MvO). These are the reports written by colonial administrators on leaving their posts. MvOs of higher level officials are stored in a separate series in the archive. Some MvOs of lower level officials (assistant residents, *controleurs* etc.) are also now available in the Rijksarchief, although many were severely cut by the political censors. Occasionally a complete version of these MvOs can be found in various personal collections (see, for example, *Collectie Korn* No. 321, below).

Finally, it should be noted that incoming *mailrapporten* were classified and stored in two separate series: open and secret. When a piece is classified as secret, it is inventorized thus: MR 1928x.

I have also cited materials stored in personal collections. I have cited in the text three such collections. V. E. Korn, who served in the Indies administration, and then as a lecturer in *adat* law, collected a large amount of material of relevance to this study. His papers along with Damsté's are stored in the Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde. R. Kern was an adviser to the Governor-General on 'Native Affairs' during the period of the communist uprisings, and the collection of his papers (available on microfilm at Cornell University Library) contains a number of items of interest. The documents cited here from these collections are:

Collectie Damsté:

No. 53 n.d. Kranten Knipsels over Minangkabau.

Collectie Korn:

No. 321 Aanvullende memorie van overgave (see above) van den Controleur van Sidjoendjoeng, B. A. Bruins, 1930-1933.

No. 327 Monografieën over adat en bestuursinrichting etc.: Afdeeling Solok, onderafdeeling Muara Labuh.

No. 352 Afschriften van Stukken en brieven betreffende het grondenrecht 1872-1936.

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Finally, I have also referred to a mimeographed statement made by a party which claimed to be a successor to the PKI of the 1920s. The party is called the 'Dewan Pusat Karya Perdjunagan Penemai Indonesia'. The statement is dated 17 February 1971, and the document was kindly made available to me by Dr. Audrey Kahin from her personal collection.

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