Colonial News Across the Metropole and Indies: The Arrest and Trial of Perhimpunan Indonesia Students, 1927–1928

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Abstract

This article examines how two Dutch-language newspapers situated on opposite sides of the colonial relationship represented the surveillance, arrest, prosecution, and acquittal of four Perhimpunan Indonesia students in 1927–1928. It compares *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, published in Semarang for a colonial readership, with the metropolitan *Haagsche Courant* of The Hague. Following the historical method used in the original research—heuristics, external and internal source criticism, interpretation, and historiography—the study analyzes thirteen newspaper editions together with Indonesian-language press reports, memoirs, and scholarly histories. Robert Entman's four framing functions guide, but do not mechanically determine, the interpretation. The article argues that the two newspapers shared a colonial security horizon while translating it into distinct journalistic registers. The Semarang paper foregrounded the anticipated danger posed by educated nationalists returning to the Indies and advocated surveillance and restriction. The Hague paper more often mediated the case through communism, parliamentary interpellation, procedural legality, and the authority of the Dutch state. The March 1928 acquittal exposed a central contradiction: months of securitized reporting had produced a presumption of danger that the prosecution could not convert into legally sufficient proof. Indigenous newspapers subsequently recoded the case as repression, solidarity, and moral victory. The article's contribution lies in treating press geography—metropole and colony—as an active element of framing and in distinguishing demonstrable circulation from unproven claims about direct effects on the national movement.

Keywords: Perhimpunan Indonesia; Mohammad Hatta; colonial press; media framing; Dutch East Indies; anticolonial nationalism; political trial

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Introduction

The arrest of Mohammad Hatta, Nazir Pamoentjak, Abdulmadjid Djojoadiningrat, and Ali Sastroamidjojo in the Netherlands on 23 September 1927 was an unusual episode in the history of Dutch colonial repression. The defendants were colonial subjects, but the coercive machinery used against them operated in the European metropole. They were students, yet the authorities treated their association, publications, correspondence, and international contacts as matters of state security. Their prosecution consequently brought two legal and political spaces into direct tension. The Dutch state claimed authority over an anticolonial movement organized in The Hague and Leiden, while Perhimpunan Indonesia used the freedoms and institutions of the Netherlands to challenge the legitimacy of Dutch rule in the Indies. When the court acquitted all four men in March 1928, the judgment ended the criminal case but did not dissolve the political meanings that newspapers had attached to it.

Perhimpunan Indonesia had travelled a considerable ideological distance before this confrontation. Founded in 1908 as the socially oriented *Indische Vereeniging*, it became the *Indonesische Vereeniging* in 1922 and adopted the name Perhimpunan Indonesia during the mid-1920s. The change in nomenclature registered a deeper transformation: a student association increasingly defined Indonesia as a political community entitled to independence, embraced non-cooperation with colonial authority, and used *Indonesia Merdeka* to formulate an explicitly anticolonial program.1 Its participation in the 1926 Bierville peace congress and the 1927 League against Imperialism congress in Brussels brought Indonesian claims into transnational networks. Hatta and his colleagues were therefore not simply expatriate students commenting from a distance. They occupied a strategic position between nationalist politics in the Indies, left-wing and anti-imperialist circles in Europe, and the administrative anxieties of the Dutch colonial state.2

Those anxieties intensified after the failed communist uprisings of 1926–1927. Colonial officials increasingly interpreted diverse forms of opposition through a security vocabulary that blurred distinctions among communism, revolutionary conspiracy, non-cooperative nationalism, and international anti-imperialism. The agreement discussed by Hatta and Semaun in late 1926, the circulation of *Indonesia Merdeka*, contacts with the League against Imperialism, and PI's links with Indonesian activists abroad supplied material for suspicion. Yet suspicion was not identical to proof. The history of the case turns on the distance between intelligence, political inference, press allegation, and legally demonstrable conduct. That distance was already visible in the first house searches of 10 June 1927 and became decisive during the March 1928 trial.3

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[1] Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro and Nugroho Notosusanto, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia V: Zaman Kebangkitan Nasional dan Masa Akhir Hindia Belanda (±1900–1942)* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2019), 354–56.

[2] Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Tonggak-Tonggak di Perjalananku* (Jakarta: PT Kinta, 1974), 49–50; John Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia dan Pergerakan Kebangsaan*, ed. Anzis Kleden (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993).

[3] Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Empat Mahasiswa Indonesia di Negeri Belanda 1927* (Jakarta: Idayu Press, 1977); Klaas Stutje, *Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and Anticolonialism among Indonesian Students in Europe, 1917–1931* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 172–74.

Newspapers did not merely transmit this conflict. They organized it for different publics. *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* was published in Semarang within the colonial society whose hierarchy PI sought to overturn. Its readers encountered Indonesian students not primarily as neighbors or participants in Dutch parliamentary life, but as educated colonial subjects who might return with credentials, networks, and a program of non-cooperation. *Haagsche Courant*, by contrast, reported from the Dutch governmental center. It followed police action, ministerial answers, parliamentary interpellations, and courtroom proceedings as events within metropolitan public life. The same four students could thus appear as a future danger to colonial order in one paper and as a problem of state security, judicial competence, and parliamentary accountability in the other.

The press history of colonial Indonesia has often emphasized the development of vernacular journalism and its contribution to political consciousness. Ahmat B. Adam showed how print commerce, language, and social debate created conditions for a modern Indonesian public sphere, while Benedict Anderson situated standardized print language and simultaneous reading within the formation of imagined political communities.4 Such scholarship is indispensable, but it can direct attention toward newspapers that articulated emerging Indonesian identities and away from Dutch-language publications that defended, rationalized, or debated colonial authority. Studies of Perhimpunan Indonesia, meanwhile, have reconstructed its ideological development, international networks, and influence on the national movement. John Ingleson's history and the memoirs of Hatta and Sastroamidjojo remain central accounts of the organization and the prosecution.5 What requires closer attention is how the spatially divided Dutch press transformed the same sequence of events into different colonial narratives.

This article addresses that gap through a comparative reading of four editions of *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* and nine editions of *Haagsche Courant* published between June 1927 and March 1928. It asks: how did each newspaper define the alleged danger posed by Perhimpunan Indonesia; how did it attribute causation and moral responsibility; what measures did it present as legitimate; and how did those choices change from surveillance to house search, arrest, parliamentary controversy, trial, and acquittal? A related question concerns reception in the Indies: what can the surviving reports in *Sin Po* and *Pertja Timoer* establish about the circulation and political appropriation of the case, and what causal claims remain beyond the evidence?

The central argument is that the two Dutch newspapers shared a colonial security horizon but did not speak in a single colonial voice. The Semarang paper more directly anticipated the disruptive potential of educated Indonesians returning

[4] Ahmat B. Adam, *The Vernacular Press and the Emergence of Modern Indonesian Consciousness (1855–1913)*, ed. Benedict Anderson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Southeast Asia Program, 1995); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

[5] John Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia dan Pergerakan Kebangsaan*, ed. Anzis Kleden (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993); Mohammad Hatta, *Untuk Negeriku: Bukittinggi–Rotterdam Lewat Betawi*, vol. 1, ed. Mulyawan Karim (Jakarta: PT Kompas Media Nusantara, 2011); Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Tonggak-Tonggak di Perjalananku* (Jakarta: PT Kinta, 1974).

to the colony. Its paternalist language made political maturity, academic attainment, and future employment into reasons for surveillance. *Haagsche Courant* more often translated colonial anxiety into metropolitan categories: communist conspiracy, criminal association, parliamentary oversight, lawful search, and judicial process. This distinction was not an opposition between propaganda and neutrality. Both papers selected and emphasized information in ways that rendered PI presumptively dangerous. Their difference lay in the institutional vocabulary through which danger became intelligible and in the remedies that each register made appear reasonable.

The article makes three contributions. First, it treats the geography of publication as an analytical variable rather than a bibliographical detail. A colonial newspaper in Semarang and a regional-metropolitan newspaper in The Hague addressed different constituencies within the same imperial polity. Second, it reads the acquittal not merely as the chronological end of the case but as a test of the preceding news frames: a prosecution built around dangerous writings and alleged revolutionary connections failed to substantiate a criminal conspiracy. Third, it limits claims of media "impact" to what the sources can bear. Indigenous press coverage, parliamentary debate, international questions addressed to Hatta, and support committees demonstrate circulation and political reuse. They do not, without reception evidence, prove that newspaper reporting caused the creation of the PNI, the Youth Pledge, or a measurable change in popular opinion.

Method

This study employs the historical method, encompassing heuristics, external and internal criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The heuristic phase involved searching for primary and secondary sources at the National Library of the Republic of Indonesia, the West Java Provincial Library and Archives Agency, the Padjadjaran University Library, and various digital newspaper collections. The primary source corpus consists of thirteen editions that serve as the research documentation: *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* of 26 June, 27 July, 2 December, and 7 December 1927; and *Haagsche Courant* of 11, 13, and 18 June, 6 and 20 July, 19, 24, and 27 October 1927, and 8 March 1928. Three Indonesian-language newspaper reports—*Sin Po* of 11 October 1927 and *Pertja Timoer* of 17 December 1927 and 31 March 1928—provide evidence of recirculation and reframing in the Indies.6

The memoirs of Mohammad Hatta and Ali Sastroamidjojo are treated as primary retrospective testimony rather than as transparent transcripts of events. They illuminate the students' experience of surveillance, imprisonment, legal defense, and international attention, but their distance from the events and their authors' later political careers require internal criticism. Secondary works by Ingleson, Poesponegoro and Notosusanto, R. E. Elson, M. C. Ricklefs, Michael C. Williams, and others supply political and historiographical context. A recent archival study by Klaas

[6] *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* (Semarang), afternoon eds., June 26, July 27, December 2, and December 7, 1927; *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon eds., June 11, June 13, June 18, July 6, July 20, October 19, October 24, and October 27, 1927, and March 8, 1928; "Penangkepan Pada Studenistudent Indonesia," *Sin Po* (Batavia), October 11, 1927; "Studenten Kita di Nederland," *Pertja Timoer* (Medan), December 17, 1927; "Studenten Indonesia di Nederland," *Pertja Timoer* (Medan), March 31, 1928.

Stutje was consulted specifically to resolve chronology and to check the relationship among police surveillance, the June house searches, the September arrests, and the March trial.7

External criticism assessed the identity, date, edition, place of publication, publisher, legibility, and provenance of each newspaper reproduction. The physical pages confirm two distinct publication settings: N.V. Publiciteitskantoor "COSMOS" in Semarang for *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* and A. Sijthoff Jr. in The Hague for *Haagsche Courant*. The appendix reproductions were matched to the newspaper list and to the claims they support. A significant chronological inconsistency emerged during this process. A number of narrative accounts state that the search at Wasstraat No. 1 took place on July 10, 1927, yet *Haagsche Courant* reported the raids on 11 June, Hatta remembered reading about them on 11 June, and archival research dates the coordinated searches to Friday, 10 June. This article therefore uses 10 June 1927 and records the correction as the result of source criticism rather than silently perpetuating the later date.8

Internal criticism distinguishes four kinds of statement: what the newspapers reported; what police, ministers, parliamentarians, defendants, or lawyers said within those reports; what memoirists later recalled; and what the historian may infer. A newspaper allegation of a "communist plot" is evidence that such a frame circulated, not proof that PI was a communist organization. A ministerial statement that searches followed legal procedure establishes the government's public justification, not the absence of intimidation. Conversely, an acquittal establishes the failure of the prosecution to prove the charges; it does not by itself establish that every contact, document, or suspicion described in intelligence records was fictitious. These distinctions are essential because the archive was produced within an unequal colonial relationship.

Interpretation employs Robert Entman's four framing functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral evaluations, and recommending treatment. They are used as historical questions rather than as a quantitative coding system. 9 Attention is given to headlines, labels, quoted voices, narrative order, analogy, and omission. The method also compares the newspapers' institutional location, intended readership, and proximity to colonial property and metropolitan politics. Framing is thus understood as a situated practice of selection and emphasis. It need not involve factual fabrication; a report can reproduce accurate statements while allocating salience in ways that privilege the state's categories.

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[7] Haris Supiandi, "Dakwah Melalui Film: Analisis Semiotika Pesan Dakwah dalam Film 'Sang Kiai' Karya Rako Prijanto," Deskovi: Art and Design Journal 3, no. 2 (2020): 109–115, https://doi.org/10.51804/deskovi.v3i2.805.

[8] *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., June 11, 1927; Mohammad Hatta, *Untuk Negeriku: Bukittinggi–Rotterdam Lewat Betawi*, vol. 1, ed. Mulyawan Karim (Jakarta: PT Kompas Media Nusantara, 2011); Klaas Stutje, *Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and Anticolonialism among Indonesian Students in Europe, 1917–1931* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 172–73.

[9] Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

Historiography organizes the results into four successive phases: the security construction before and during the June searches; the legal and political justification of July; the September arrests and October–December parliamentary controversy; and the March 1928 trial. The Discussion then compares the two newspapers across these phases and places the Dutch-language narratives beside indigenous press responses. The source base contains no systematic readership survey, circulation-specific reception archive, or documentation proving that officials or nationalist organizations acted because of a particular article. Accordingly, the study makes claims about representation, circulation, and appropriation, not measurable media effects.

Results

From International Activism to a Security Case

Perhimpunan Indonesia's international strategy made the organization visible beyond the conventional administrative reach of the Netherlands Indies. Through *Indonesia Merdeka* and participation in European congresses, the students presented independence as a claim grounded in national self-determination rather than as a request for gradual colonial reform. Their refusal of cooperation challenged the premise that educated Indonesians should be incorporated into the colonial bureaucracy as loyal intermediaries. The students' political value and their perceived danger arose from the same resources: education, mobility, Dutch-language competence, organizational discipline, and access to international networks.10

After the communist uprisings in Banten and West Sumatra, colonial intelligence increasingly folded heterogeneous anticolonial actors into a single field of suspicion. The Hatta–Semaun contacts were especially useful to this interpretation. PI regarded itself as nationalist and defended its organizational autonomy; the authorities emphasized communication with communist figures and the possibility that international support might connect students in Europe to revolutionary activity in the Indies. The resulting security logic worked by association. Contacts that could be interpreted as transnational anticolonial cooperation became possible evidence of direction from Moscow, while the radical language of *Indonesia Merdeka* could be detached from argumentative context and read as operational incitement.11

Administrative pressure preceded criminal prosecution. Scholarship recipients were warned against PI membership and activity, and officials gathered information through correspondence, university contacts, landlords, and police observation. Stutje's archival research shows how extensive this environment had become: private homes, financial relations, travel, and informal conversations could all enter official files.12 Yet the move from observation to prosecution required a legally actionable

[10] R. E. Elson, *The Idea of Indonesia*, ed. Anton Kurnia (Jakarta: PT Serambi Ilmu Semesta, 2009); Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro and Nugroho Notosusanto, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia V: Zaman Kebangkitan Nasional dan Masa Akhir Hindia Belanda (±1900–1942)* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2019), 354–56.

[11] Michael C. Williams, *Arit dan Bulan Sabit: Pemberontakan Komunis 1926 di Banten*, ed. Rumekso Setyadi and Saiful Huda Shodiq (Jakarta: Syarikat Indonesia, 2003); John Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia dan Pergerakan Kebangsaan*, ed. Anzis Kleden (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993), 79–83.

[12] Klaas Stutje, *Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and Anticolonialism among Indonesian Students in Europe, 1917–1931* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 169–72.

case in the Netherlands, where the Minister of Colonies lacked the extraordinary powers available to colonial authorities in the Indies. This jurisdictional difference encouraged officials to recast a colonial political conflict as a criminal problem under Dutch law.

The first major police intervention occurred on 10 June 1927, when houses in The Hague and Leiden were searched and large quantities of papers were seized. Wasstraat No. 1 in Leiden, where Ali Sastroamidjojo's family and other students lived, was both a domestic space and a node of student solidarity. Later recollection emphasized the sudden, armed, and humiliating character of the search. Rumors about weapons, opium, and even bombs circulated in the press, although not all became part of the eventual prosecution. 13 The disparity between sensational allegation and later legal relevance would recur throughout the case.

June 1927: Anticipatory Danger and Communist Conspiracy

The two newspapers entered the story from different starting points. In its 26 June issue, *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* focused on Indonesian students as future political actors in the colony. The paper observed that academic qualification would allow men such as Ali Sastroamidjojo to return and strengthen the nationalist ranks. It therefore urged attention to their "doen en laten"—their conduct—once they were back in the Indies. The problem was anticipatory: education had equipped colonial subjects with forms of authority that could be turned against colonial rule. The recommended response was surveillance from the outset, justified by their political antecedents.14

This framing depended on a paternalist contradiction. The colonial state had promoted limited educational advancement, but the newspaper treated the political autonomy of educated Indonesians as evidence that education had exceeded its proper function. A student who completed a degree was no longer simply a beneficiary of Dutch tutelage; he could become an organizer, advocate, or professional with greater capacity to contest colonial rule. The paper therefore transformed achievement into risk. Its anxiety was directed less at an immediate violent act in the Netherlands than at the social authority these students might exercise after repatriation.

[13] Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Tonggak-Tonggak di Perjalananku* (Jakarta: PT Kinta, 1974), 55; Klaas Stutje, *Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and Anticolonialism among Indonesian Students in Europe, 1917–1931* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 172–73.

[14] "De 'Indonesische' Studenten," *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* (Semarang), afternoon ed., June 26, 1927.

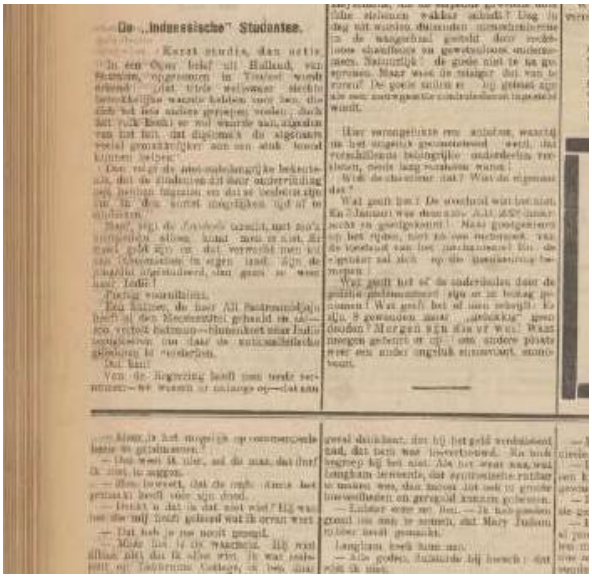


Figure 1. "De 'Indonesische' Studenten," *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, afternoon edition, 26 June 1927.

Haagsche Courant began with a more spectacular metropolitan security narrative. Its 11 June edition reported a "communistisch complot" among Indonesian youths in The Hague and Leiden, described loaded revolvers, and suggested that timely judicial action had averted a grave danger.15 These claims placed readers inside a drama of discovery: hidden organization, armed students, and preventive state action. The paper's early framing preceded adjudication and encouraged an inference of guilt from the scale and urgency of the raids.

The 13 June edition complicated but did not abandon this frame. It reported Hatta's denial that PI was communist and his insistence that the association was nationalist and committed to Indonesian independence. Yet it also relayed the description of PI as a "kankergezwel"—a cancerous growth—in Leiden and treated refusal to issue an absolute condemnation of communism as evidence of dangerous proximity to it.16 The metaphor was politically consequential. A "cancer" is not debated or accommodated; it is excised. By presenting moderate Noto Soeroto as a counterexample to radical PI nationalism, the report also established a colonial taxonomy of acceptable and unacceptable Indonesian politics. Loyalty, moderation, and cooperation marked the safe subject; non-cooperation and independence marked the pathological one.

On 18 June, *Haagsche Courant* carried PI's own counter-narrative. A leaflet described the searches as a continuation of the oppression long imposed on Indonesians and rejected official talk of a dangerous communist conspiracy. PI did not conceal that its members were left-wing nationalists working for independence, but it contested the substitution of "communist" for "nationalist."17 The inclusion of this response created an appearance of dialogic coverage, yet its position within a sequence already organized around conspiracy limited its capacity to reset the terms.

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[15] *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., June 11, 1927.
[16] *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., June 13, 1927.
[17] *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., June 18, 1927.

PI had to answer categories chosen by the state and press rather than introduce the case on its own premises.

The 6 July report extended the dispute to finance. Hatta denied that PI was funded by the Soviet government and maintained that the association relied on dues and Indonesian support. A limited personal transfer associated with Semaun nevertheless allowed the newspaper to reassert financial ties to Moscow.18 Here the causal frame moved from ideology to money: a link between individuals was made to carry the weight of an institutional alliance. The newspaper's interpretation was not invented from nothing, but it enlarged ambiguous evidence through the political symbolism of "Moscow." Communism functioned as an explanatory shortcut that connected internationalism, anticolonialism, radical writing, and revolutionary threat.

July 1927: From Sensation to Procedural Legitimation

By late July, both papers had begun to stabilize the raids within more durable narratives. *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* declared on 27 July that *Indonesia Merdeka* had long used seditious language and that PI's extremism was generally known. More serious, it suggested, was the report that PI might have assumed leadership over the PKI. 19 The article converted repetition into corroboration. Because the newspaper had previously labeled the association extremist, a new allegation could appear as the logical development of an established character rather than as a claim requiring independent proof. The frame thus accumulated over time: radical language made communist leadership plausible, and alleged communist leadership retrospectively confirmed the dangerousness of radical language.

The accusation also reveals the asymmetry of colonial political classification. PI's claim to national leadership challenged both communist subordination and Dutch authority. Hatta's dealings with Semaun concerned the relationship between nationalist and communist forces, but the newspaper's formulation collapsed negotiation, influence, and organizational command. The phrase "the leadership of the PKI" transformed political contact into hierarchical control. That transformation strengthened the moral evaluation of PI as deceptive and subversive while making stricter surveillance seem proportionate.

Haagsche Courant of 20 July adopted a more legal-administrative register. It reproduced the Minister of Justice's answers to parliamentary questions, stressing that there had been reasonable suspicion of an offense under Article 140 of the Dutch Penal Code, that the house searches had been conducted according to law, and that a final opinion must await completion of the criminal investigation. 20 The report also corrected the most extravagant early rumors by acknowledging that only a limited number of unlicensed firearms had been found and that study materials had not been

[18] *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., July 6, 1927.

[19] "Terzijde: Bedenkelijke Pleidooien," *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* (Semarang), afternoon ed., July 27, 1927.

[20] *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., July 20, 1927.

indiscriminately seized. This did not repudiate the security frame. Instead, it repaired it by replacing sensational claims with ministerial procedure.

The correction is historiographically important. Colonial media did not operate only by exaggeration. When early allegations became difficult to sustain, official language could preserve the legitimacy of intervention on narrower grounds. "Reasonable suspicion," judicial authorization, and the relevance of seized documents established an image of proportionate government even before the evidence was tested at trial. In Entman's terms, the treatment recommendation shifted from emergency police rescue to the orderly continuation of investigation. The conclusion—PI required coercive attention—remained stable while the justification changed.

This contrast between the newspapers should not be overstated into a fixed opposition. The Semarang paper also invoked official authority, and the Hague paper sometimes used highly inflammatory language. Their dominant tendencies nevertheless reflected different political distances. For colonial readers in the Indies, the most vivid danger lay in the return of trained nationalists and their possible effect on indigenous politics. For readers in The Hague, the legitimacy of Dutch institutions—police, minister, parliament, and court—was itself at stake. Procedural narration could therefore defend empire by representing coercion as lawful governance rather than as colonial exception.

September–December 1927: Arrest, Parliament, and Political Maturity

The investigation entered a new phase on 23 September, when a second round of searches resulted in the arrest of Hatta, Pamoentjak, Djojoadiningrat, and Sastroamidjojo. The men were taken to prison in The Hague, held separately, and interrogated over the following months. The original suspicion of a criminal association increasingly gave way to charges based on allegedly seditious writing in *Indonesia Merdeka*. This movement in the theory of the case indicates the prosecution's difficulty in converting intelligence and association into proof of an operational conspiracy.21

The arrests also turned the case into a parliamentary controversy. *Haagsche Courant* reported on 19 October that communist parliamentarian Lou de Visser had expanded his interpellation to include the searches, confiscation of PI documents, and the arrest of Indonesian students.22 On 24 October, the paper devoted attention to a PI manifesto seeking support from Dutch intellectuals, workers, and the wider public. Its editorial language characterized the appeal as a "daverend manifest"—a resounding or thunderous manifesto—and accused the students of brutally agitating against the government, the judiciary, and "imperialist Netherlands."23 The report conceded that youthful inexperience might explain rhetorical excess, but this apparent

[21] John Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia dan Pergerakan Kebangsaan*, ed. Anzis Kleden (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993), 82–83; Klaas Stutje, *Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and Anticolonialism among Indonesian Students in Europe, 1917–1931* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 173–74.

[22] *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., October 19, 1927.

[23] "Een Daverend Manifest," *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., October 24, 1927.

mitigation reinforced paternalism: political conviction became immaturity, and anticolonial argument became a failure of appropriate expression.

The parliamentary debate of 27 October provided a more plural documentary field. De Visser denounced the measures as "judicial terror," argued that the Netherlands was moving toward fascism, and maintained that raids and arrests had been undertaken for political reasons to strike at the bearers of nationalism.24 Minister of Justice Jan Donner defended the investigation, while other parliamentarians supported state action. The defeat of De Visser's motion demonstrated that criticism existed within metropolitan politics but did not command a majority. *Haagsche Courant* could reproduce dissent at length while allowing governmental response and parliamentary outcome to restore institutional authority.

This was not neutral pluralism. The ordering of voices mattered. Criticism appeared as an interpellation to which the responsible minister replied; the narrative culminated in the rejection of the motion. Readers encountered colonial coercion as an object of legitimate debate contained within the Dutch constitutional system. The students' political claim—Indonesian independence—remained secondary to questions about whether Dutch officials had acted correctly. By translating colonial conflict into parliamentary accountability, the paper widened the range of views without placing Dutch sovereignty itself in question.

The Semarang newspaper's December coverage made paternalist judgment more explicit. Its 2 December report presented Donner's explanation that PI was suspected of seeking separation from the Netherlands, including by violent means, and that the searches concerned action against order and authority.25 On 7 December, it discussed PI's post-arrest manifesto but portrayed Indonesian nationalism as intellectually derivative, emotionally impatient, and politically unprepared. The demand for independence was likened to the whining of a child who wants to walk without a mother's guidance.26 The analogy did more than insult the students. It naturalized hierarchy. If Indonesia was a child and the Netherlands a protective mother, colonial rule could be represented as responsibility rather than domination, while independence became premature separation rather than a political right.

The language of political maturity connected several elements of the Semarang frame. Education was desirable so long as it produced useful colonial subjects; nationalist use of education signaled ingratitude. Indonesian criticism was dismissed as theoretical because Dutch administration was credited with unity, infrastructure, and economic development. The students' internationalism was interpreted as susceptibility to imported doctrines rather than as strategic agency. This discourse narrowed the field of legitimate politics: Indonesians could advise, improve themselves, or cooperate, but a demand to end Dutch sovereignty proved that they were not ready to exercise it.

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[24] *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., October 27, 1927.

[25] "De Gearresteerde Studenten," *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* (Semarang), afternoon ed., December 2, 1927.

[26] "De 'Indonesische' Actie in Nederland: Een Daverend Manifest," *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* (Semarang), afternoon ed., December 7, 1927.

March 1928: The Courtroom and the Failure of Securitized Proof

The trial opened in The Hague on 8 March 1928. *Haagsche Courant* presented it under the heading "Het proces tegen de Indonesische studenten" and included a portrait of Mohammad Hatta. The prosecution relied heavily on passages from *Indonesia Merdeka*, including formulations that only revolution could offer the oppressed a way out and that violence could be broken only by violence.27 Extracted from their discursive setting and assembled within the indictment, such phrases enabled the state to treat political rhetoric as evidence of incitement. The newspaper's placement of them gave the prosecution's vocabulary substantial prominence.



Figure 2. "Het proces tegen de Indonesische studenten," *Haagsche Courant*, afternoon edition, 8 March 1928.

Prosecutor Rijkens also invoked Moscow, Semaun, Tan Malaka, and the Comintern. The accumulated references linked PI to the international revolutionary field constructed since June. Yet the defense, led by J. E. W. Duys with Mr. Mobach, challenged both legal applicability and evidentiary sufficiency. Duys argued that the case was political rather than criminal and warned against making the judiciary an instrument of the executive. Hatta's *Indonesië Vrij* transformed the defense into a systematic indictment of colonialism. By using the languages of law, history, economics, and national self-determination, he rejected the premise that anticolonial nationalism could be reduced to criminal intent.28

[27] "Het Proces tegen de Indonesische Studenten," *Haagsche Courant* (The Hague), afternoon ed., March 8, 1928. The Dutch passages cited by the prosecution translate as "Only revolution can offer the oppressed a way out" and "Only through violence can violence be broken."

[28] Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Tonggak-Tonggak di Perjalananku* (Jakarta: PT Kinta, 1974), 64–65; Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Empat Mahasiswa Indonesia di Negeri Belanda 1927* (Jakarta: Idayu Press, 1977).

The courtroom created a problem for the newspapers' earlier frames. For months, the press had treated secrecy, weapons, communist contact, radical publication, and anti-Dutch rhetoric as mutually reinforcing signs of danger. Criminal adjudication required a more discriminating connection among defendants, acts, intent, and applicable law. The prosecution's transition from criminal association to seditious writing revealed that the broad security story did not translate easily into a specific offense. The defense could therefore separate advocacy of independence from proof of an actionable plan of violence.

On 22 March 1928, the court acquitted the four students and ordered their release. The court ruling stated that the allegations brought were not proven and that the relevant provisions of Dutch criminal law could not serve as a basis to uphold the charges as presented.29 The acquittal should be interpreted precisely. It was a legal defeat for the prosecution and a political opportunity for PI. It did not certify every PI statement as moderate, nor did it erase the organization's contacts with left-wing and communist activists. It established that the state had failed to prove the charged criminal conduct. That distinction exposes the central contradiction of securitized journalism: a presumption of political danger can be rhetorically powerful while remaining legally insufficient.

The trial also altered the political scale of the event. Hatta's prison defense became a durable anticolonial text, while the courtroom allowed PI to address a public far beyond its membership. The students were no longer represented only through police claims or editorial analogies; their political program entered the record as an answer to prosecution. Repression did not simply silence. It concentrated attention, produced documents, mobilized legal advocates, and linked the organization to supporters in the Netherlands, the Indies, and wider anti-imperialist networks.30

Discussion

One Imperial Security Horizon, Two Journalistic Registers

The comparison supports neither a model of identical colonial propaganda nor a simple contrast between a biased colonial paper and a neutral metropolitan one. Both newspapers began from the assumption that PI's campaign for independence posed a problem for Dutch authority. Both associated radical nationalism with communism, treated state surveillance as presumptively reasonable, and judged the students through colonial categories of loyalty and maturity. Their frames diverged most clearly in the scale at which danger was imagined and the institutional language through which treatment was justified.

[29] Ali Sastroamidjojo, *Empat Mahasiswa Indonesia di Negeri Belanda 1927* (Jakarta: Idayu Press, 1977); Klaas Stutje, *Behind the Banner of Unity: Nationalism and Anticolonialism among Indonesian Students in Europe, 1917–1931* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2016), 173–74.

[30] Mohammad Hatta, *Untuk Negeriku: Bukittinggi–Rotterdam Lewat Betawi*, vol. 1, ed. Mulyawan Karim (Jakarta: PT Kompas Media Nusantara, 2011); John Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia dan Pergerakan Kebangsaan*, ed. Anzis Kleden (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993), 82–83.

Table 1. Comparative framing of the Perhimpunan Indonesia case, 1927–1928

Phase	Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië	Haagsche Courant	Historical interpretation
Before and after the June searches	Educated Indonesians as future organizers in the colony; return and professional authority magnify danger	Communist conspiracy, weapons, secret organization, and preventive police action	Colonial proximity favors anticipatory control; metropolitan proximity favors emergency-security narrative
July investigation	Long-known extremism and alleged PI leadership of the PKI	Reasonable suspicion, Article 140, lawful search, ministerial explanation	Both preserve suspicion; the Hague paper repairs early sensationalism through procedure
September–December arrests	Separation from the Netherlands, disorder, ingratitude, and political immaturity	Interpellation, manifesto, ministerial defense, parliamentary contest	Semarang naturalizes hierarchy; The Hague absorbs conflict into institutions of the Dutch state
March trial and acquittal	Earlier frame remains a background of presumptive danger	Detailed courtroom narrative emphasizing incriminating texts but including defense	Legal proof fractures the accumulated security narrative without automatically eliminating colonial suspicion

For the Semarang newspaper, geography made the future central. The students' actions in Europe mattered because they might return to the Indies as lawyers, administrators, intellectuals, or political organizers. Surveillance was thus prospective and social: officials should watch educated nationalists before their ideas and networks became embedded in colonial society. The framing function of treatment recommendation was comparatively direct—monitor, restrict, and prevent. Paternalist analogy supplied the moral evaluation. Nationalists were ungrateful children or inexperienced theorists, whereas Dutch rule represented order, development, and adult responsibility.

For *Haagsche Courant*, the case was physically and institutionally closer. The searches occurred in Dutch cities; a minister answered questions; parliamentarians debated coercion; and a court determined guilt. The newspaper's reporting consequently used the languages of communist conspiracy, legality, and constitutional process.

Treatment was still coercive, but it was narrated as investigation and adjudication. This legalism was not merely cosmetic. Metropolitan institutions imposed real constraints, as the acquittal demonstrated. At the same time, procedural narration could legitimize colonial power by shifting the question from whether Indonesians had a right to independence to whether Dutch officials had followed correct process.

Entman's categories clarify this comparison. The shared problem definition was a radical student organization challenging imperial unity. Causal interpretation centered on communist influence, international networks, and inflammatory writing, thereby displacing the structural cause emphasized by PI: colonial domination itself. Moral evaluation differed in tone—paternalist immaturity in Semarang, irresponsible radicalism and security risk in The Hague—but assigned legitimacy to Dutch authority. The sharpest difference appeared in treatment recommendation. The colonial paper favored continuing surveillance of future actors in the Indies; the metropolitan paper favored legally authorized investigation and prosecution. These were not competing ends so much as territorially adapted forms of imperial governance.31

The Acquittal as a Historiographical Test

The acquittal offers a method for evaluating the preceding press narrative. Security reporting frequently operates cumulatively. A weapon mentioned in one article, a communist contact in another, and a radical phrase in a third can produce a coherent impression even when their legal relationship remains uncertain. By March 1928, PI had been framed through multiple mutually reinforcing signs: Moscow, Semaun, secret finance, extremism, weapons, revolutionary language, and anti-Dutch purpose. The courtroom required these signs to be reorganized into proof. Their cumulative rhetorical force did not satisfy that demand.

This does not mean the newspapers fabricated the entire case. Some students possessed firearms; PI maintained contacts with actors across the European left; its journal used uncompromising revolutionary language; and Hatta negotiated with Semaun. Historical analysis should neither erase these facts nor allow them to stand in for the alleged offense. The problem was inferential compression: association became subordination, rhetoric became operational plan, and opposition to colonial order became criminal attack on the Dutch state. The acquittal broke that chain at the point of adjudication.

The gap between public suspicion and legal result also complicates a triumphalist reading of Dutch justice. The court's independence created space for acquittal, but the students had already endured six months of detention, isolation, repeated interrogation, and disruption of study. The ability to obtain skilled Dutch counsel and attract political support mattered greatly. Law both constrained repression and served as its instrument. The case therefore belongs neither to a simple history of liberal legality nor to a simple history of arbitrary colonial power. It

[31] Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

demonstrates how an imperial state could pursue political objectives through ordinary metropolitan institutions and still encounter limits within them.

Counter-Framing in the Indies and the Limits of "Impact"

The case did not remain confined to the Dutch-language press. *Sin Po* reported the arrests on 11 October 1927, describing searches in The Hague, Leiden, and Amsterdam, the detention of Hatta and other PI figures, the seizure of documents, and the state's attempt to associate the students with communism and rebellion.32 Its account made Dutch coercion visible to readers in the Indies and interpreted the scale of surveillance as evidence that the colonial state regarded overseas student nationalism seriously. *Pertja Timoer* of 17 December presented the prisoners as students who remained nationalist despite repression and noted support from Lou de Visser and anti-colonial organizations in Europe.33 After the acquittal, its 31 March 1928 report treated the verdict as a moral victory and stressed the inability of the prosecution to demonstrate a concrete revolutionary act.34

These reports show recirculation, translation, and political appropriation. News produced within Dutch imperial institutions was not received passively. Indigenous newspapers could preserve the same basic event while reversing its moral coordinates. Where Dutch papers identified danger, indigenous papers identified repression; where official rhetoric emphasized communist conspiracy, they emphasized nationalist constancy; where the state sought deterrence, they found solidarity and victory. The colonial information system thus generated meanings that escaped official control.

The surviving evidence nevertheless does not justify a direct causal chain from reporting to later national events. PI's ideas, returning members, *Indonesia Merdeka*, study clubs, the PNI, youth organizations, and international anti-imperialist networks developed through overlapping channels. The PNI was founded in July 1927, before the September arrests, making the claim that the prosecution caused its formation chronologically untenable. Likewise, temporal proximity between the March 1928 acquittal and the October Youth Pledge does not prove that press coverage produced the pledge. Poesponegoro and Notosusanto, Ingleson, and Kahin establish ideological and organizational connections within the broader nationalist movement, but not a discrete media effect attributable to the two newspapers studied here.35

More defensible claims concern visibility and resources. Hatta remembered that European reporting made the searches a subject of questions in international meetings. Support committees raised money for the defense. Parliamentary interventions converted the case into a public controversy. Indigenous newspapers

[32] "Penangkepan Pada Studenistudent Indonesia," *Sin Po* (Batavia), October 11, 1927.

[33] "Studenten Kita di Nederland," *Pertja Timoer* (Medan), December 17, 1927.

[34] "Studenten Indonesia di Nederland," *Pertja Timoer* (Medan), March 31, 1928.

[35] Marwati Djoened Poesponegoro and Nugroho Notosusanto, *Sejarah Nasional Indonesia V: Zaman Kebangkitan Nasional dan Masa Akhir Hindia Belanda (±1900–1942)* (Jakarta: Balai Pustaka, 2019); John Ingleson, *Perhimpunan Indonesia dan Pergerakan Kebangsaan*, ed. Anzis Kleden (Jakarta: Pustaka Utama Grafiti, 1993); George McTurnan Kahin, *Nasionalisme dan Revolusi di Indonesia*, ed. Hasnul Arifin (Yogyakarta: Penerbit Narasi, 2021), 93–95.

reframed the arrests for readers in the Indies. *Indonesië Vrij* acquired an audience because the trial created a platform for its argument. These are demonstrable forms of amplification. Whether they changed individual attitudes, recruitment, or organizational strategy requires evidence such as correspondence, meeting minutes, audience testimony, circulation data, or policy records that the present corpus does not provide.

Historiographical Contribution and Source Limits

Reading the case through both colonial and metropolitan newspapers adds a missing dimension to histories based primarily on nationalist memoir and organizational development. Memoirs recover experience, intention, and retrospective meaning. Newspaper reports recover the public categories through which Dutch readers encountered the case. Neither source type should dominate the other. When Sastroamidjojo recalled armed police invading Wasstraat No. 1, his testimony documents the experienced violence of the search; when the minister described lawful procedure, the newspaper documents the state's legitimating account. The historical problem lies in their relationship, not in choosing one as an uncomplicated mirror of reality.

The press archive also reveals the unevenness of "colonial opinion." The Semarang paper's readers were embedded in the social and economic consequences of colonial hierarchy, while the Hague paper's readers encountered empire through national politics and news. Both belonged to the Dutch imperial public, but their distance from the colony shaped salience. These findings clarify the study's main conclusion: colonial perspective was shared, yet its expression varied according to place, audience, and institution. Press geography functioned as part of the framing mechanism.

A number of limitations should be noted. The research corpus is limited to documented newspaper editions rather than being based on a comprehensive quantitative survey of all articles in both newspapers. Precise data regarding circulation and readership composition are unavailable. Furthermore, editorial intent cannot be reconstructed through editorial correspondence. Additionally, some footnotes contain only brief references or translation notes. Accordingly, this article preserves verifiable bibliographic details, converts every citation used into a full Chicago note, and does not invent missing page numbers or article titles. The archival images are used as evidence of layout, headline, and provenance, not as decorative illustration.

The novelty of the article lies in combining those limits with comparative analysis. It does not claim that one newspaper was simply more biased than the other. It shows how empire generated multiple but compatible news forms: anticipatory surveillance in the colony, procedural legitimation in the metropole, and counter-framing in the indigenous press. The acquittal exposed the instability of the first two without eliminating their underlying presumption that Indonesian independence was a security problem.

Conclusion

The arrest and trial of four Perhimpunan Indonesia students became a trans-imperial news event because it joined colonial nationalism, metropolitan law, international anti-imperialism, and a geographically divided press. Between June 1927 and March 1928, *Algemeen Handelsblad voor Nederlandsch-Indië* and *Haagsche Courant* constructed the case through a shared colonial security horizon. Both associated PI with radicalism and communism, privileged the state's suspicion, and treated Indonesian independence as a threat to existing order. Yet their dominant registers differed. The Semarang newspaper emphasized the future danger of educated nationalists returning to the Indies and recommended continuing surveillance. The Hague newspaper placed the case within communist conspiracy, ministerial accountability, parliamentary debate, and criminal procedure.

This chronological reconstruction also clarifies factual inconsistencies in the previous account: the first coordinated house searches occurred on 10 June 1927, not 10 July. The September arrests, six months of detention, trial beginning on 8 March 1928, and acquittal on 22 March formed a sequence in which the theory of the case narrowed from criminal association to seditious writing. That narrowing matters. It reveals how broad political suspicion failed to become legally sufficient proof.

The acquittal did not erase the colonial press frame, but it exposed its central weakness. Months of reporting had made weapons, international contacts, communist figures, and radical sentences appear as a coherent conspiracy. The court required a specific relation among action, intent, defendants, and law, and the prosecution did not establish it. PI converted the trial into a platform for *Indonesië Vrij*, while indigenous newspapers translated the case into narratives of repression, solidarity, and moral victory.

The article's contribution is therefore both empirical and historiographical. Empirically, it compares thirteen Dutch-language editions with Indonesian press responses and the defendants' retrospective accounts. Historiographically, it demonstrates that metropole and colony did not produce interchangeable colonial news: publication geography shaped the scale of danger, the authority of quoted institutions, and the remedies made to appear legitimate. Its methodological contribution is equally important. The sources support claims about representation, circulation, and political appropriation, but not a direct causal claim that reporting produced the PNI, the Youth Pledge, or a measurable transformation of public opinion. Preserving that distinction makes the case more historically persuasive, not less significant.

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