

Afro-Ásia

A Biannual Journal of the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil

Afro-Ásia is a full open access, biannual publication of the Federal University of Bahia, Brazil, which publishes peer-reviewed scholarly articles, book reviews, and, in some cases, exceptionally singular primary sources. While the language of the journal is Portuguese, manuscripts may also be submitted in English, French, or Spanish. Articles will normally be reviewed in their original language, and upon acceptance will be translated into Portuguese. The journal welcomes a broad range of academic disciplines on topics related to the African Diaspora, Africa, and Asia – especially history, anthropology, sociology, literature, and cultural studies.

The journal was founded in 1965, as the scientific divulgation vehicle of the Center for Afro-Oriental Studies (CEAO), established in 1959 in the wake of the Bandung Conference and at the onset of African decolonization. CEAO was the first Brazilian academic institution of its genre, and it was made possible by the convergence of multiple interests, from state agencies to social collective actors. In fact, the state of Bahia, with its roughly 80 percent African-descent population, had since the beginning of the 20th century been a hotspot for the making of a transnational research field on race relations and Afro-American culture. From the 1930s and well into the 1960s, a host of foreign scholars, especially American and French, came to Bahia to study Black neighborhood and religious communities, looking for 'African survivals' and profoundly intrigued by the local racial convivial mores that presented such a stark contrast to US segregation. Bahian scholars, some of them Black or mixed-race, had entered the field since its inception and tried to carve out spaces for the organic intellectuals of the Black community – namely, female religious leaders of *Candomblé* – to be properly heard and considered in academic venues such as the Second Afro-Brazilian Congress, held in Salvador in 1937. Boosted by the post-war economic boom, which in Brazil was paired with a democratic interstice, Bahian scholars with links to leftist parties or *Candomblé* houses came together with Portuguese humanist and political exile Agostinho da Silva, who was in touch with anticolonial activists from Portuguese-speaking African

countries. Together, they established CEAO as a specialized agency within the state public university.

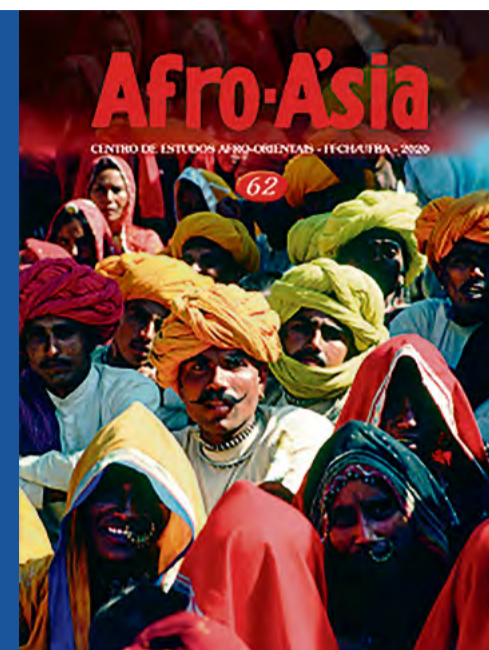
The Brazilian government was then trying a more independent foreign-relations policy, abandoning its traditional automatic alignment with the United States and reaching out to key actors in the emerging Third World, such as Cuba, China, India, or Indonesia. Thus, funding for an academic center that could help government officials to better understand the frenzy developments in Asia and Africa became available, and that small group of intellectuals in Bahia took their opportunity to design the first university mobility programs with the African continent. Early researchers affiliated with CEAO spent long research stays in different African countries, some of them even pursuing masters and doctorates, which were still rare in Brazil at the time. CEAO also hosted the first African university students in Brazil, by means of a pioneering initiative that would later serve as a model for the main Brazilian official scholarship program for foreign undergraduate and graduate students, directed at candidates from what we today call the 'Global South.' Moreover, Yoruba and Japanese language classes, open to the general public, were regularly offered from the 1970s and 1980s. Soon, the center was also recognized as a focal point of articulation for anti-racist struggles in Brazil, especially due to its always intense dialogue with *Candomblé* communities, the Black movement, and its organic intellectuals. *Afro-Ásia* was regularly published until 1970, facing thereafter an extended period of

Call for Papers *Afro-Ásia*

ISSN 0002-0591 (print)
1981-1411 (online)
afroasia.ufba.br

In a bid to expand the Brazilian conversation in the field of Asian Studies, and to better engage with a more international research agenda, *Afro-Ásia* invites scholars at any level of their career development, from any part of the world, to submit original, full-breadth research articles, theoretical and methodological essays, or historiographical balances from any area of the social sciences and humanities that represent a significant contribution to the scholarly debate.

Afro-Ásia does not charge APCs and offers full and immediate access to all its published content (more info at <https://doaj.org/toc/1981-1411>). All submissions go through a desk review and, if accepted by the editors, a double-blind peer review. Manuscripts may be submitted in English, French, Spanish, or Portuguese, and articles will normally be reviewed in their original language. Upon approval, the authors must take charge of the translation into Portuguese. The journal editors may assist the



authors in finding a suitable, affordable translator. Also, in the frame of our new IAS-CEAO partnership, current and former IAS Research Fellows may apply for support in the translation process.

To submit an article, please visit our submission page: <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/afroasia/about/submissions>. Be welcome to join and help strengthen the Brazilian conversation on Asian Studies!

institutional fragility with only a few editions spaced along the years. From 1995 on, the journal managed to retake its regular publication frequency and established itself as one of the most important venues for Brazilian academic conversations on the African Diaspora, Africa, and Asia, reaching out to Spanish-speaking Latin America, where it also has a significant reader base.

Needless to say, the interest in Asia has always been a secondary concern for both CEAO and the Brazilian research community at large, in part because of the prohibitive costs involved in doing research in Asian countries and a faltering funding strategy by the Brazilian government through subsequent regime changes. Of course, *Afro-Ásia* vied to bring discussions about Asia to its readers in Brazil, translating a number of research articles by established foreign researchers, most of them Westerners. Published pieces ranged from more exoticizing, Orientalist perspectives on themes such as literature in Sanskrit or the Noh theater, to reflections on pressing contemporary issues such as the Afro-Asian solidarity movement, Gandhi's political philosophy, Nehru's ideals for a new international order, and Sino-Indian frontier disputes. However, a recognizable, institutionalized academic field of Asian Studies has yet to emerge in Brazil. Certainly, beyond the initial interest in Asian decolonization and political affirmation in the world arena, a growing number of research themes has been developing along the last decades, sometimes stemming from emigrated Asian-descent communities present in major Brazilian cities, particularly

the national economic metropolis, São Paulo, where university courses on particular Asian matters are offered more regularly. A certain number of scholars in literary studies, history, geography, sociology, and anthropology have consistently built their careers as specialists in Asian Studies, and many are now actively involved in teaching and supervising a potential new generation of researchers throughout the country. The general interest in Asia is on the rise, pushed by China's and India's economic puissance, their ever-expanding global reach, as well as considerations about the role of Brazil in affirming the agency of the Global South and forging South-South cooperation initiatives and strategic partnerships.

In recent years, this growing Brazilian interest in Asia has been reflected in the issues of *Afro-Ásia*, which has assumed the mission of supporting and helping to consolidate Asian Studies made in Brazil. Understandably, contemporary China and India, Brazilian partners in the BRICS coalition, concentrate much of the scholarly gaze, but other spaces are also starting to attract the focus of Brazilian researchers. In this special section of The Region, we feature some examples of the varied interests – in terms of methodological, empirical, and geographical framing – that have recently appeared in our pages.

Fábio Baqueiro Figueiredo

is Professor of African History at the Bahia Federal University, Brazil. He was also one of the editors of the journal *Afro-Ásia* from 2018 to 2023. Email: fbaqueiro@ufba.br

How Many Hands Does It Take to Write History of Literature? The Politics of Theoretical Divergences in Indonesia

Felipe Vale da Silva

While searching for the origins of modern Indonesian literature, we come across a recurrent formulation: "modern Indonesian literature was born around 1920." Such an assumption leads back to Dutch colonial scholar Andries Teeuw's book *Pokok dan Tokoh* (1952), and it is fair to say that it has been accepted as a historical fact ever since.

Accordingly, natives of what was then called the Dutch East Indies developed their literary expression due to the exertion of the educational policies of the Dutch crown, especially after the 1901 reform package known as *Ethische politiek*. The new colonial code not only aimed at spreading knowledge amongst natives, but also created an official publishing house called Balai Pustaka,

whose goal was to monitor the 'proper' literary material made available for local populations.

For this article, we analyzed newly-found documents that reveal the imperial goals and institutional structure of the Balai Pustaka: being directly connected to the colonial agency *Kantoor voor de*

Volkslectuur, it performed the dual role of a Ministry of Education and Ministry of Propaganda in the Indies. The main goal was to convey Western concepts of cognition to indigenous populations, thereby outlining and establishing values, behavioral models, and new ranges of social functions. Thusly, a significant part of Balai Pustaka's activities consisted in translating classics of Western literature into local languages. In the 1920s, it provided institutional support to native writers based in Sumatra, the same who wrote the classics of modern Indonesian expression, who were later named the Balai Pustaka literary school.

For this new literary school, the awakening of a modern conscience necessarily involved abandoning the *adat*, the customary norms that guide indigenous conduct within a given community. It involved replacing tradition for European values – in fact, most materials sponsored by Balai Pustaka portrayed the dilemmas faced by educated natives living under the new ‘Associationist’ regime. Marah Rusli’s *Sitti Nurbaya* (1922), for instance, is a privileged picture of the period’s context due to its clear-cut use of epochal stereotypes. The coming-of-age style of narrative portrays a Westernized young native struggling against regressive tribal lifestyles; indigenous life soon stops being harmonious and transforms into a life of pointless observance to traditional roles and obscurantism. Here a new Indies society is symbolized by this young man who dares to question tradition and to behave like a Dutchman – even though tribal politics hinder his personal ambitions, his example is set in paper for future readers. He is a martyr of the incomplete modernization of the Indies, so to speak.

Not all Balai Pustaka novels are pro-Associationism, though. Abdul Muis’ *Salah Asuhan* (1928) is a surprisingly pessimistic portrayal of the Westernizing tendencies of the time over impressionable young men. The book guides us to a poorly explored facet of anticolonial thinking during the Balai Pustaka era. The institution’s policies had many implications: one that ended up creating a monopoly over the Indonesian editorial market and stifling dissident authors and groups. Thus, examining the institution helps with the project of historical reinterpretation about the origins of literary modernity in Indonesia.

The full Portuguese-language version of this article originally appeared in *Afro-Ásia* under the title “Ficções históricas de Timor-Leste: tempo, violência e gênero na produção fílmica pós-independência” (n. 62, 2020, pp. 270-298). Available at <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/afroasia/article/view/35873>

Felipe Vale da Silva,
Federal University of Goiás, Brazil.
Email: felipe.vale.silva@gmx.com

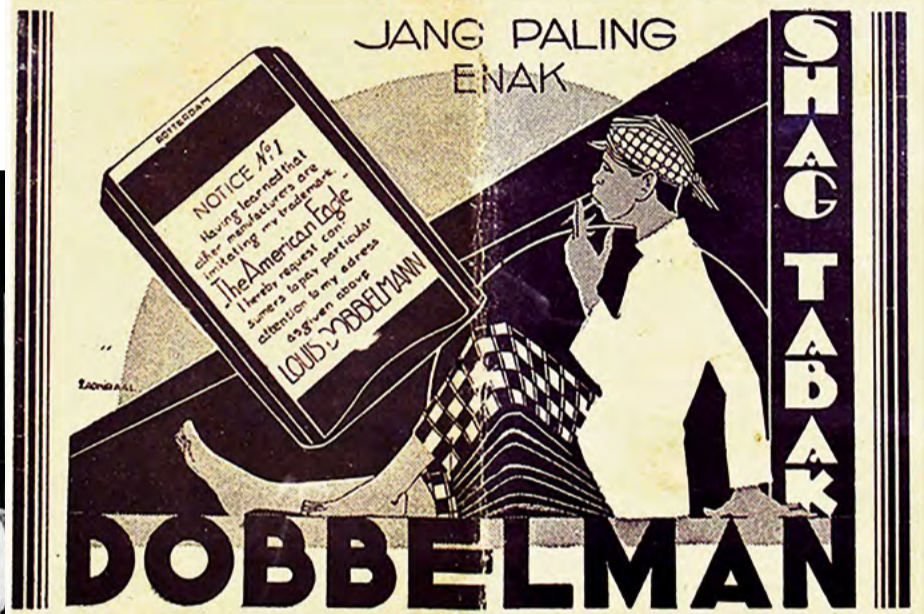
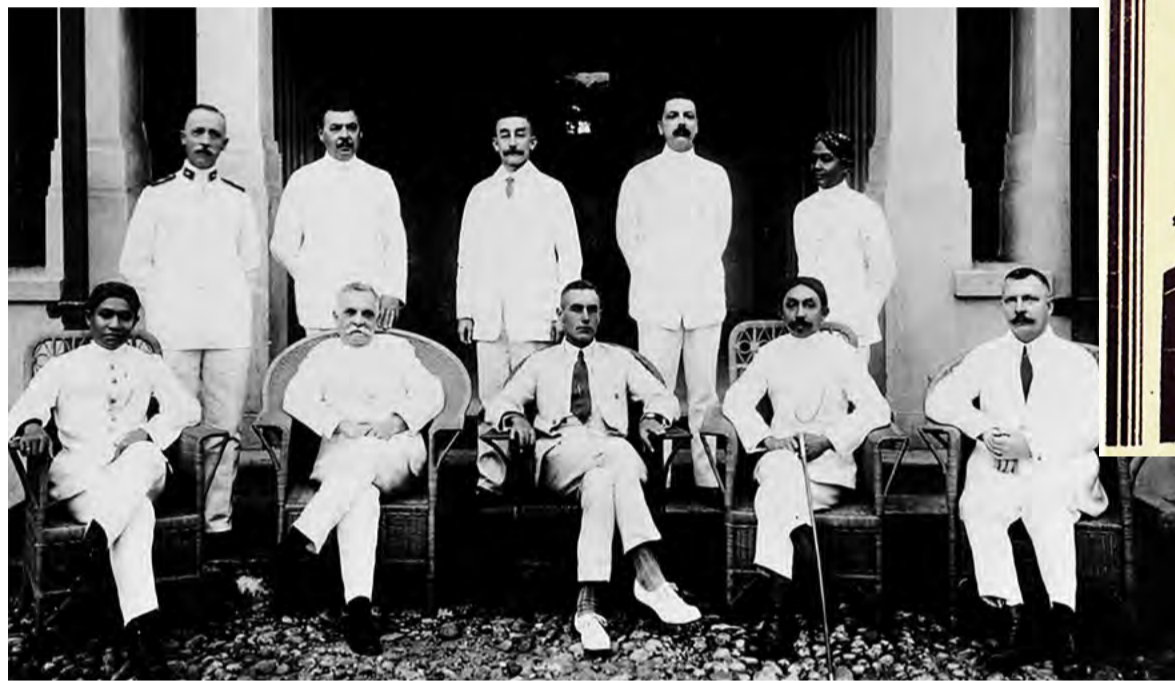


Fig. 2 (above): Javanese-language magazine *Majalah Kajawen*, monitored by Balai Pustaka personnel, bringing translations of everything from Western literature classics to medical advice, Islamic prayers to advertising, second issue, 1928. (Photo by the author, 2020)

Fig. 3 (left): Active members of Balai Pustaka: the new face of Dutch Associationism in the mid-1920s. (Photo courtesy of the Rinkes family, <https://rinkes.nl/genealogie/douwe-adolf-rinkes/balai-poestaka>)



Historical Fictions in East Timor: Time, Violence and Gender in Post-Independence Film Production

Daniel De Lucca

The article discusses film production in and about Timor-Leste in direct connection with its political history. In an environment strongly marked by oral culture, where the literate world speaks little to citizens, the conditions of film production also involve a limited socio-technical network for the creation and distribution of films. Audiovisual consumption is often hindered by serious infrastructural problems, such as access to electricity, especially outside of the capital, Díli. Also, scarce public funding means that the audiovisual sponsors are typically private individuals and foreigners, promoting productions under international and inter-institutional cooperation regimes. I make a contrapuntal reading of three international award-winning historical fictions – *Answered by Fire* (2006), *Balibo* (2009), and *A Guerra da Beatriz* (2013) – as artifacts of the Timorese imagination that objectify social processes, interpreting, recreating, and fixing them in image and sound devices, in order to question their effects and conditions of possibility. The meanings and consequences of transforming the history of the liberation struggle into fiction films are examined, considering that many professionals involved in the films discussed had their lives directly affected by the historical events portrayed. The narrative strategies for constructing time, violence, and gender constitute key categories that serve as a guide in film analysis.

It is important to take into account the international connections involved in these productions. These are narratives whose creation reveals exchanges and commitments with international agencies and agents, which has allowed the Timorese filmmakers an amplified visibility in worldwide circles. They convey the image of other nations, positioning them (and East Timor itself) in a space of global representations. Australia appears as an important place of production, training, and technical cooperation in the audiovisual field, while Indonesia (which occupied East Timor from 1975 to 1999) appears as an antagonistic, imperial other. In its turn, Portugal (the former colonial power) does not emerge as a narrative reference whatsoever; neither are the Portuguese conceived as part of the intended audience. This suggests that regional powers have acquired more importance, inside and outside the films, than that of the old European colonial power.

With the exception of *A Guerra da Beatriz*, the films have a recurring theme of the protection and international aid provided to the Timorese. This theme relates to the West continuing to see and imagine East Timor mostly through the lens of victimization, necessity, and assistance. If *Answered by Fire* highlights the challenges met by UN peacekeeping officials in the field, *Balibo*



Fig. 1 (above): Beatriz (Irim Torentino) and Teresa (Augusta Soares), sisters-in-law and guerrillas in *A Guerra da Beatriz*. (Screen print by the author, 2018)

follows the death of Australian journalists in the context of the Indonesian invasion in 1975. *A Guerra da Beatriz*, in turn, practically does not feature any mediation with the West. In this landmark of national cinema, released as “East Timor’s First Feature Film,” the external perspective is radically subverted, giving way to an emerging and distinctive point of view – non-Eurocentric, non-Díli-centric, and non-phallogocentric – where women from rural areas are presented not through the customary tropes of insufficiency and precariousness, but rather as social beings full of integrity and agency. After tracking important moments in the birth of both the nation and the Timorese cinema, this study highlights the deep links existing in East Timor between audiovisual

production and historical imagination, not only in projections about the past but also in expectations about the future.

The full Portuguese-language version of this article originally appeared in *Afro-Ásia* under the title “Ficções históricas de Timor-Leste: tempo, violência e gênero na produção fílmica pós-independência” (n. 61, 2020, pp. 270-320). Available at <https://periodicos.ufba.br/index.php/afroasia/article/view/27479>

Daniel De Lucca,
University for International Integration of Afro-Brazilian Lusophony, Brazil.
Email: dandelucca@unilab.edu.br