

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>

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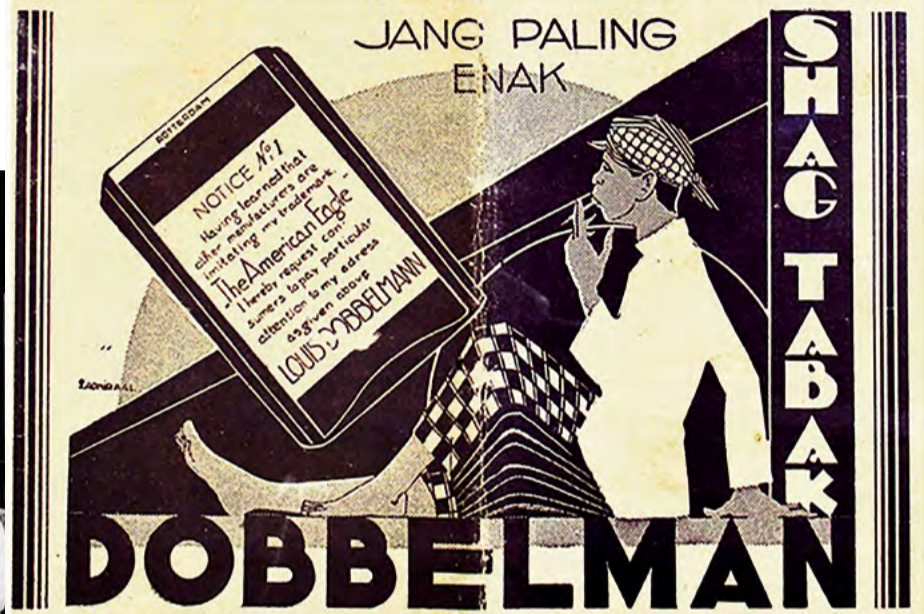
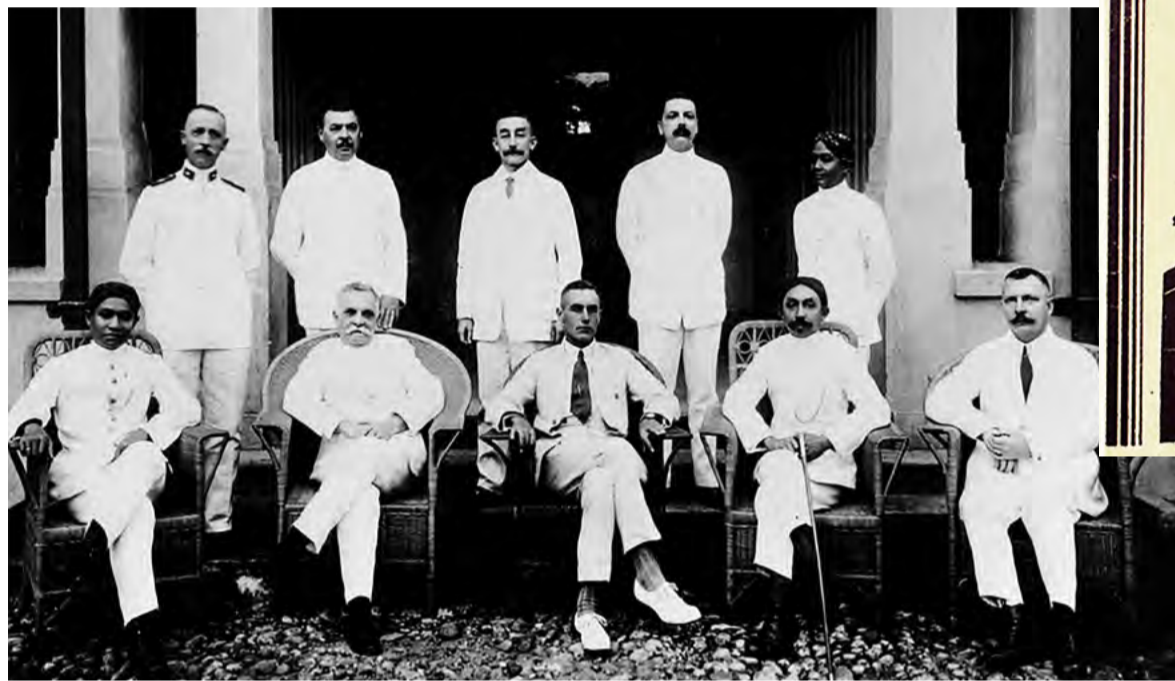


Fig. 2 (above): Javanese-language magazine *Majalah Kajawen*, monitored by Balai Pustaka personnel, bringing translations of everything from Western literature classics to medical advice, Islamic prayers to advertising, second issue, 1928. (Photo by the author, 2020)

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.

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