Inside Gazes, Outside Gazes: The Influence of Ethnicity on the Filmmakers of the Dutch East Indies (1926–1936)

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The first decade of the Indonesian film industry film industry was marked by competition between Chinese and European filmmakers to reach audiences by employing strategies—in film language, plotting, and casting—influenced by the customs of both their respective ethnic groups, and their target audiences. This paper explores the role of ethnicity in the first ten years of Indonesian film industry, beginning with L. Heuveldorp and G. Krugers' 1926 production *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* [*The Misguided Lutung*], and ending with Albert Balink and Mannus Franken's 1936 film *Pareh* [*Rice*]. Referring to concrete examples from the films produced in Indonesia during this period, the article concludes that filmmakers fell into one of four prominent categories: Europeans targeting European audiences, Europeans targeting indigene audiences, Chinese targeting Chinese audiences, and Chinese targeting indigene audiences.

***Keywords**: Audiences, Indonesia, Ethnicity, Filmmaking, Cinema of Indonesia*

Introduction

Though the act of filmmaking usually involves a large number of people fulfilling a variety of roles—sound recording, acting, editing, etc.—producers and directors have consistently been identified with the agency determining a film's presentation, storytelling, and technique. They are credited as the creative forces behind films, and both scholars and the general public alike recognize and refer to their "creative vision" and directorial styles as having inalienable roles in shaping films. Even when industrial or institutional forces are assumed to have authored the work, and thus production and directorial influence are assumed to be minimal, films are frequently identified with their directors (cf. Axelrod, 1996; Cattrysse, 1996).

Producers' and directors' backgrounds, including ethnicity, can thus be assumed to play a role in the filmmaking process. This is particularly interesting to explore in situations where marked ethnic divides separate a population. In the early 20th century Dutch East Indies (what is now Indonesia), ethnicity was used as an artificially constructed marker of

identity, and the colonial government, through legislation and social practice, emphasized the separation between different ethnic groups and reduced inter-ethnic collaboration (Tan, 2008).

Since Indonesia's independence, nationalistic and nativistic narratives in film have maintained ethnic divides while simultaneously ignoring the significant role of ethnic Chinese filmmakers in the evolution of a pre-national cinema (Sen, 2006). These narratives have positioned *Darah dan Doa* [*The Long March*] (1950) as the first film in the Indonesian cinematic canon owing to director-cum-producer Usmar Ismail's indigenous heritage (Biran, 2009).

Noting this tendency, this paper maps the ethnicity of filmmakers who actively produced the earliest films of colonial Indonesian cinema, as well as the effects of filmmakers' and audiences' respective ethnic backgrounds on these filmmakers' productions. Owing to a drastic shift in the film industry following the release of *Terang Boelan* [*Full Moon*] in 1937, this paper focuses on the first decade of the domestic film industry, beginning with the first locally-produced feature film, *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* [*The Misguided Lutung*] (1926), and ending with *Pareh* [*Rice*] (1936).

By examining films produced in this decade—some 43 films produced by 19 men—this study identifies four categories of filmmakers active during this period, based on their ethnicity and target audience: European producers making films for European audiences: European producers making films for indigenous audiences; Chinese producers making films for Chinese audiences; and Chinese producers making films for indigenous audiences.

The main sources of data for this article are contemporary film reviews, synopses, newspaper articles, and magazine articles, recent books, and articles regarding the colonial film industry. Reading extensively about the film was necessary due to material loss of films produced in the Indies during the earliest years of the film industry. For instance, of George Krugers' body of work—including five films and several documentaries—only one documentary, *Het groote Mekka-Feest* [*The Great Mecca Fest*] (1928), survives. Krugers' other films were lost in Hong Kong after he left the Indies (Krugers, personal communication, June 8, 2015).[1]

Film and Ethnicity in the Indies

After film developed as a medium in Europe in the 1890s, the technology spread quickly. Within a decade, film had reached the Dutch East Indies; Tofighian (2013) records the earliest screenings in the colony as occurring in 1896. The medium gained considerable popularity, and foreign films, both fiction and non-fiction, were regularly imported. These initially came from the United States and Europe, though Chinese films were later imported from

Shanghai. Domestic production of documentary films began in 1911 (though productions shot by migrants in the colony can be traced back further), and in 1923 the establishment of a production house focused on fiction films was announced. This endeavor appears to have been unsuccessful—no films produced by the company are recorded. It was ultimately another company, Java Film, that released the first domestic feature film, *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* [*The Misguided Lutung*], in December 1926. Over the next decade, 43 films were recorded as domestically produced and released (Biran, 2009).

Before purpose-built cinemas were built, the earliest films were screened by independent touring exhibitors, in small theaters—often only big enough to hold only several dozen people—which were located outdoors or in residential buildings repurposed for commercial exploitation (Jauhari, 1992). As these earliest films were short, several could be screened in one showing. A 1905 advertisement in the newspaper *Bintang Betawi* [*Star of Batavia*], for instance, offered two films in a single showing: one regarding a recent war,[2] and another titled simply *Boenga Mawar* [*Rose*] (Biran, 2009). A bilingual program produced in 1909 for the Semarang-based Wilhelmina Theatre ("Wilhelmina Bioscope program"), meanwhile, lists five short films being screened, each dealing with a different subject—a soldier, a lottery, a bridegroom, home repair, and Corsican culture—as well as a stage performance of Honoré de Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin* [*The Magic Skin*].

The Wilhelmina Bioscope program addresses prospective audience members differently depending on their ethnic background. The Dutch text of the program identifies each listed film with one or more different adjectives: "soldier humor," "laughable," "nice," "comical," and "fascinating and dramatic." Balzac is mentioned explicitly in regards to the stage performance, and the five leads and their theaters of origin are all likewise named. The Malay text is simplified, identifying films as only *loetjoe* [funny] or *aneh* [strange]—the latter of which covers both the lottery and Corsican culture. The Malay text entirely omits any mention of the stage performance's cast or Balzac, instead identifying the story as simply being about *koelit wasiat* [magic skin]. A reminder, not present in Dutch, is included in Malay: "Please come early or you will not get a seat."[3]

The *Bintang Betawi* advertisement, meanwhile, lists different ticket prices for audience members: tickets for ethnic Chinese viewers cost f 0.25 each, whereas tickets for indigenous viewers—identified as *Slam* [for Islam] in the advertisement—cost f 0.10 each. The advertisement lists no price for Dutch viewers, who were not a core part of the newspaper's readership and thus less likely to see it.

The implications are clear: those who could read Dutch (mostly ethnic Dutch, but also the indigenous and Chinese elites educated in the language)

were expected to be able to recognize and make use of more specific definitions than those who had to read in Malay (indigenous and Chinese audiences, perhaps educated but to a lesser degree as those who read Dutch), who were expected to require simpler descriptions. Dutch language readers were assumed to be interested in performers and punctual, whereas those who read Malay could be assumed to be disinterested in performance details and liable to come late. Ethnic Chinese audiences, meanwhile, were assumed to have greater disposable income than indigenous audiences, who were identified with Islam, the widespread and most practiced religion. Similar discriminatory tendencies have been found in advertisements from other parts of colonial Indonesia, though their frequency diminished in later years.

This tendency towards discrimination and differentiation was rooted in the inter-ethnic disharmony of the time (Woodrich, forthcoming). At the turn of the century, the Dutch of a pure European background, and to a lesser degree the Dutch of Eurasian heritage, occupied the highest legal and social standing in the Indonesian archipelago. As such, they had access to the most exclusive facilities, the best education, and considerable commercial opportunities. The ethnic Chinese and other "foreign Asians," meanwhile, held a lower legal and social standing, though they still had access to great commercial opportunities as merchants and intermediaries. Often lacking access to Dutch-run establishments, ethnic Chinese developed and ran their own sizeable market for businesses and media. The indigenes, meanwhile, occupied the lowest legal and social standing. Basic education was generally only available to the wealthy or those of noble descent; the majority of indigenes received no education and thus worked as manual laborers in agriculture or similar fields. Interactions among these ethnic groups—including, but not limited to persons of Arabic and Indian descent—were often strained (Woodrich, forthcoming).

Despite the historical differentiation and discrimination among ethnic groups, cross-ethnic cooperation—including entrepreneurs and manufacturers targeting consumers belonging to an ethnic group other than their own—was not uncommon. Before the rise of the domestic cinema, perhaps the most prominent example of cross-ethnic cooperation was the theater. Troupes travelling the archipelago—such as the Komedie Stamboel, in business between 1891 and 1903 (Cohen, 2006), and Dardanella, in business between 1926 and 1936—featured people of various ethnic backgrounds in managerial and creative roles (Biran, 2009). The Komedie Stamboel included Dutch, Chinese, Arab, Javanese, and Indian actors, was owned by A. Mahieu, a Eurasian man, and used the Malay language (Cohen, 2006). Dardanella, meanwhile, was owned by a man of Russian

descent, Willy A. Piedro, and featured indigene and Chinese performers such as Dewi Dja', Astaman, Ratna Asmara, and Tan Tjeng Bok. Its main writer, Andjar Asmara, was of Minang heritage (Biran, 2009). Such troupes, according to Tofighian (2013), "managed to gather people from all strata of society to their exhibitions, which helped create temporary liminal spaces where audiences mixed" (p. 46).

Theatrical trends are of particular pertinence here owing to the long history of interconnection between the travelling theater and film. Ties between the Indonesian film industry and theater were established well before the first films were produced in the country, and travelling theatrical troupes and other forms of entertainment incorporated cinematographs and other film devices as early as the 1890s (Tofighian, 2013). The *kroncong* music—a genre which developed as a fusion of Portuguese and indigenous styles—which accompanied early feature films was shaped by the musical structures developed by the Komedie Stamboel (Cohen, 2006), and by the 1940s several actors who had first found fame on stage—including Dardanella's Astaman, Ratna Asmara, and Tan Tjeng Bok—had transitioned to film. Theatrical influences in film remained common, despite wide criticism among the intellectual elite, well after Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945 (Biran, 2009).

Discussion

A total of nineteen men are recorded as having produced or directed at least one feature film in the Dutch East Indies between 1926 and 1936.[4] Of these, six were of European heritage: L. Heuveldorp, G. Kurgers, Ph. Carli, M. H. Schilling, Albert Balink, and Mannus Franken. Twelve were of Chinese heritage: Nelson Wong, Othniel Wong, Joshua Wong, David Wong,[5] Lie Tek Swie, Liem Goan Lian, Tan Boen Soan, Tjan Tjoen Lian, Jo Eng Sek, Jo Kim Tjan, Tan Khoen Yauw, and The Teng Chun. One individual, Bachtiar Effendi, was part of an indigenous ethnic group.

This list, however, must be understood in the context of the filmmaking practices in the Dutch East Indies. In many domestic productions between 1926 and 1936, filmmakers concurrently occupied the role of director, producer, editor, cinematographer, and even, with the rise of talkies in the 1930s, sound technician. As a result, they had a great degree of creative control over their films, selecting stories to adapt, or writing their own,[6] determining camera angles, and editing to produce a coherent narrative (Biran, 2009). For example: George Krugers served as producer, director, cinematographer, and editor for his feature film debut, *Eulis Atjih* (1927). In a 2015 interview, Krugers' son, Jan, explained that:

> [Krugers] did everything, including the chemical process of fixation of the silver in the film… He hired untrained people and trained them. My mother [Krugers' second wife, Elisabeth Schut] sewed all the clothing. The biggest cast he worked with consisted of forty men. (personal communication, June 8, 2015)

Some companies opted to hire a director—sometimes even former actors—instead of entrusting directorial decisions with the producer. Where the producer and the director are two different people, the producer retained creative control over the finished work; the director's role was limited to little more than dialogue coach (Said, 1982). As such, in mapping filmmakers' target audiences, we must focus on the producers' ethnic background. As both Lie Tek Swie and Bachtiar Effendi were directors, they lacked the agency to determine their respective films' target audience.

Ethnicity, Filmmakers, and Target Audiences

Films produced by Europeans for Europeans

Between 1926 and 1936, two filmmakers of European descent targeted their films at audiences of a similar background: Ph. "Flip" Carli, who was of mixed Italian and Sundanese ancestry, and M. H. Schilling, who was of Dutch descent.

Carli began producing documentary films in 1919 through his company, Cinowerk Carli. He segued into making feature films, including *De Stem des Bloeds* [*The Call of Blood*], *Sarinah*, and *Karina's Zelfopoffering* [*Karina's Suffering*], in the early 1930s. Schilling became active in film production at about the same time. He released the short *Sinjo Tjo Main di Film* [*Sinjo Tjo Acts in a Film*] in 1931, and the family drama *Zuster Theresia* [*Sister Theresia*] in 1932. Carli worked as the sole producer, director, and cinematographer of his films, whereas Schilling worked with the Wong brothers—Nelson, Joshua, and Othniel—on his productions.

The films by these men shared several common narrative elements. First, all of them were set in the Dutch East Indies, rather than the Netherlands, and dealt with issues more prominent among the Dutch colonists. Carli's productions focused on women of European descent. *De Stem des Bloeds* (Carli, 1930, as cited in Kwee, 1930a) followed a *nyai*—an indigenous mistress—who lived with her Eurasian children as indigenes until their Dutch patriarch returned after fifteen years abroad, while *Karina's Zelfopoffering* (Carli, 1932, as cited in Biran, 2009) was set at the court palace in Yogyakarta and followed a young Eurasian woman who enters a love triangle with a European representative and his wife. Schilling's production *Zuster Theresia*

(1932, as cited in Biran, 2009), meanwhile, followed a romance among Europeans colonists in the orchards of Bandung. These films prominently featured persons of European or Eurasian descent in their casts, including Annie Krohn, the mystic Sylvain Boekebinder, and Ida and Carl Schilling.

Advertisements for these films used a number of strategies to reach Dutch audiences. The poster for *Zuster Theresia*, for instance, depicted Flora, the titular nun portrayed by Alle Heymann, in the center of an empty backdrop. The title positioned Flora's religion prominently, even though Flora does not become a nun until late in the film. This outward show of Christianity would have appealed more to Dutch audiences than the predominantly Muslim indigenous viewers. The commemorative book *10 Jarig Jubileum van Filmland* (*Ten Year Jubilee of Filmland Magazine*, 1932) featured an advertisement for *Karina's Zelfopoffering*; in it, the first image viewers see is the European representative standing with Karina, who is sporting Javanese-style clothes. The names included in the advertisement are all noticeably European—Jean de la Motte, W. Batten, Erna Zwartjes, etc.—even though other reports suggest that majority of the cast was of indigenous descent ("Filmnieuws: Karina's Zelfopoffering," 1933).

Though films made by these producers and directors predominantly targeted Dutch audiences, they did not wholly alienate or exclude indigenous audiences or other ethnicities. Indigenous audiences made up the majority of viewers of *De Stem des Bloeds* ("De Films der Week," 1930); this film being offered with both Dutch and Malay language intertitles (Kwee, 1930a) supported its popularity among non-Dutch audiences. Meanwhile, despite the Dutch-language dialogue *of Zuster Theresia*, some members of the indigenous intelligentsia viewed the film (Pane, 1953). These films also featured indigenous traditions such as the costumes and make-up of the Yogyakarta palace (*Karina's Zelfopoffering*) and the hunting of elephants (*De Stem des Bloeds*), albeit from an outsider's gaze.

Films produced by Europeans for indigenes

The second category of filmmakers identified as having produced films between 1926 and 1936 were the filmmakers of European descent who made their films, at least primarily, for Indigenous audiences. This category includes two filmmakers: L. Heuveldorp and George Krugers.

In 1926, Heuveldorp, primarily a documentary maker, was responsible for *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* [*The Misguided Lutung*], the first feature film produced in the Indies. Krugers, meanwhile, was a lab technician under Heuveldorp who, after being involved in the production of *Loetoeng Kasaroeng*, made his own films as producer, director, editor, and, later, sound technician. Krugers' feature films include *Eulis Atjih*, a film commonly referred to as

Karnadi Anemer Bangkong [*Karnadi the Frog Contractor*],[7] and *Huwen op Bevel* [*Forced to Marry*].

Three of these four productions used Sundanese in their titles and were adapted from stories already popular among indigenous audiences in Bandung, West Java, where Heuveldorp and Krugers were based. *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* (Heuveldorp, 1926, as cited in Biran, 2009) was based on the legend of the same name and set in a Sundanese kingdom, whereas both *Eulis Atjih* (Krugers, 1927, as cited in Woodrich, forthcoming) and the film known as *Karnadi Anemer Bangkong* (Krugers, 1931, as cited in Woodrich, forthcoming) were urban stories adapted from novels that were popular with indigenous readers and (in adaptation) theatergoers. *Huwen op Bevel* (Krugers, 1932, as cited in Biran, 2009) was likewise set in an urban area and, unlike Krugers' previous productions—which centered around members of the lower classes—featured a young indigenous intellectual as its main character.

The casts of these films appear to have been mostly or entirely indigenous. *Loetoeng Kasaroeng* featured the children of Bandung's regent, Wiranatakusumah V, who provided funding for the production (Biran, 2009). Though the casts of Krugers' films are not recorded, he is known to have hired amateur indigenous actors from the Bandung region (Krugers, personal communication, June 8, 2015).

Advertisements for the films reflect this casting, though their wording differs depending on the target readership. One advertisement for *Eulis Atjih* in the *Bataviaasch Niuewsblad*, a newspaper with a predominantly Dutch readership, promotes the film using the politically safe terms *Indië* and *Indiesche* (the noun and adjective forms of *Indies*, respectively). This advertisement touts that *Eulis Atjih* will convince Dutch audiences that "even the Indies film industry is capable of producing beautiful films" ("Eulis Atjih" 1927a, p. 10),[8] a statement that is simultaneously boastful and belittling ("even," as if this ability is unexpected).

Another advertisement for *Eulis Atjih*, in the Malay-language newspaper *Pewarta Soerabaia*, is both more positive and politicized, inviting audiences to "see how the Indonesian people are clever enough at playing in films, no less than in films from Europe or America" ("Eulis Atjih", 1927b, n.p.).[9] The advertisement replaces the term *Indies* with *Indonesia*, which had already been adapted by the nationalist movement to promote indigene actors as being on equal footing with European and American actors. The role of the *kroncong* ensemble, led by a Mr. Kayoon, underscores the film's target audience: indigenous viewers were associated with *kroncong* despite how the genre was pioneered by Indonesians (Cohen, 2006).

Though these films were targeted towards indigenous audiences, and *Eulis Atjih* was reportedly a commercial success, they were presented through the othering gaze of ethnography, and were thus generally received with indifference by their target audience (Biran, 2009). Krugers, despite his strong connections with Bandung's indigenous community—including the religious figure Agus Salim and the lawyer Sartono—appears to have had an imperfect understanding of indigenous culture (Woodrich, forthcoming): Biran (2009), based on a 1971 interview with Joshua Wong, writes that Krugers included scenes of Karnadi, the titular character of the film known as *Karnadi Anemer Bangkong,* eating frogs. This, he writes, caused an outcry among indigenous Muslims who considered frog meat *haram* (forbidden).[10] The failure of this film contributed to the collapse of Krugers' studio, Krugers-Filmbedrijf, and to him leaving Indonesia four years later (Biran, 2009). Efforts by Dutch filmmakers to reach indigenous audiences thus appear to have been, for the most part, less than successful.

Films produced by ethnic Chinese for ethnic Chinese

The third category of filmmakers active between 1926 and 1936 is ethnic Chinese filmmakers who produced films for Chinese audiences. This category includes the first ethnic Chinese film producers in Indonesia: Liem Goan Lian, Tjan Tjoen Lian, and David Wong (*Lily van Java* [*Lily of Java*]),[11] Tan Boen Soan (*Setangan Berloemoer Darah* [*A Handkerchief Caked in Blood*]), and Jo Eng Sek (*Si Tjonat*). This category also included the period's most productive filmmaker, The Teng Chun, who produced at least eleven films between 1931 and 1936, including *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* [*The Rose of Cikembang*], *Sam Pek Eng Tay* [*Butterfly Lovers*], *Ouw Peh Tjoa* [*Madame White Snake*], and *Tie Pat Kai Kawin* [*Tie Pat Kai Marries*]. The Wong brothers, meanwhile, worked as hired directors for Liem, Tjan, and Jo, though their creative influence appears to have been limited.

The earliest of these films were set in the modern-day Indonesia, either in an urban setting (such as *Lily van Java* [Wong & Wong, 1928, in Biran, 2009], set in Batavia) or in more rural areas (*Si Tjonat* [Jo & Wong, 1929, as cited in Kwee 1930a]. Some were based on popular works of Chinese Malay literature: *Boenga Roos dari Tjikembang* (The, 1931, in Woodrich, forthcoming), for instance, was based on a novel by Kwee Tek Hoay which had sold out its initial print run of 1,000 copies. Frequently featured in these films were romance and action, as in the star-crossed love of *Lily van Java* and the main character's defense of a young woman in *Setangan Berloemoer Darah* (Tan, 1929).

These early films' themes were generally those common in contemporary films and theatrical productions with broad target audience (Woodrich, forthcoming). The main exception was *Resia Boroboedoer* [*Secret of*

Borobudur] (1928, as cited in Kwee, 1929a), the plot of which drew heavily from Buddhism: in this film, a woman seeks Gautama Buddha's ashes at Borobudur before ultimately becoming an ascetic guardian of the temple.

Later films, however, are perhaps the most illustrative of these producers' expectations of their audiences. The Teng Chun directed a is the series of Malay-language films based on Chinese legends and literature between 1931 and 1937, including adaptations of *Sam Pek Eng Tay* [*Butterfly Lovers*], *Ouw Peh Tjoa* [*Madame White Snake*], and *Tie Pat Kai Kawin* [*Journey to the West*]. Unlike the numerous stage and film adaptations imported from China, which used Mandarin Chinese, The's adaptations used vernacular Malay in their dialogue and even in their alternative titles. *Ouw Peh Tjoa* (1934, as cited in Biran, 2009), for instance, was also advertised as *Doea Siloeman Uler Puti en Item* [*Two Snake Deities, White and Black*] whereas *Tie Pat Kai Kawin* (1935, as cited in Biran, 2009) was also known as *Siloeman Babi Perang Siloeman Monjet* [*The Pig God Fights the Monkey God*] as it focused on the interactions between the half-pig Tie Pat Kai and the pious monkey king Sun Go Kong. Though the choice of Malay allowed these films to be followed by indigene audiences, who enjoyed the films' action (Biran, 2009), this language selection was also a recognition that the many ethnic Chinese viewers were unable to fluently speak or understand Mandarin. This gave The's films an edge over imported Chinese productions.

Though several of the films discussed here were marked failures—Kwee (1929b) notes that the first two domestic film production companies owned by ethnic Chinese closed after only one production—during the first decade of film production in the Indies, it was often profitable to target films at ethnic Chinese audiences (Woodrich, forthcoming). The Teng Chun in particular was able to maintain and build his film company, Cino Motion Pictures, despite the ongoing Great Depression. By 1941 he had drawn his brothers into the filmmaking business and established two subsidiary companies (Biran, 1971).

Nevertheless, despite this openness to creating films for ethnic Chinese audiences, filmmakers also had to be mindful of how indigene audiences would respond to their films. Novels featuring derogatory language or similarly offensive attitude towards the indigene population—such as *Tjerita Oeij Se* [*The Story of Oeij Se*] (Thio Tjin Boen. 1903), which portrayed a Chinese woman marrying a Javanese man and converting to Islam to fulfill her father's punishment for his sin of theft and greed—could have been unable to pass the censorship bureau if adapted to film and, if passed, may have drawn protests, and poor ticket sale from indigene audiences.

Films produced by ethnic Chinese for indigenes

A fourth category of filmmakers active during this period features those who, despite being of ethnic Chinese heritage, produced films intended for indigenous audiences. The most prominent member of this group was Tan Khoen Yauw, the founder of Tan's Film Company, who operated in collaboration with his brother and co-financier, Tan Khoen Hian. Tan's Film Company produced five films targeted at indigenous audiences between 1929 and 1932: the silent films *Njai Dasima* [*The Mistress Dasima*], *Si Ronda*, *Nancy Bikin Pembalesan* [*Nancy Takes Her Revenge*], and *Melati van Agam* [*Jasmine of Agam*], and the talkie *Njai Dasima*. Tan's Film Company employed both an ethnic Chinese director, Lie Tek Swie, and an indigenous filmmaker, Bachtiar Effendi. The brothers Nelson, Othniel, and Joshua Wong, in the films they produced, likewise targeted indigenous audiences, producing titles such as *Lari ka Arab* [*Fleeing to Arabia*], *Indonesia Malaise* [*The Malaise in Indonesia*], and *Si Pitoeng*

Though these filmmakers' backgrounds differed considerably, all had ties with indigenes. Biran (2009) notes that Tan Khoen Yauw grew up in Kwitang, Batavia, and is known to have established relationships with the area's indigene population from a young age, while the Wong brothers came to the Indies to work with Miss Riboet's Orion, a travelling stage troupe owned by Tio Tek Djien that drew Dutch, Chinese, and indigenous audiences (Biran, 2009).

Contemporary sources indicate that the decision to target indigene audiences was a deliberate one, and thus had a conscious effect on how films were made. In a 1929 interview with Kwee Tek Hoay shortly before the release of the first film version of *Njai Dasima*, Tan Khoen Yauw said:

> Our intent is not to release films which will satisfy the Chinese or Europeans, but only to attract the lower-class indigene audiences. That is why we must choose stories which we feel indigene audiences will enjoy, then present them in such a manner that they suit the interests of viewers from that group (Kwee, 1929b, p. 1199).[12]

Shared characteristics likewise revealed these films' target audience. First and foremost, the films' stories focused on indigenous characters and life in the Indies, either past—as with *Njai Dasima* (Tan & Lie, 1929/1930 and Tan & Effendi, 1932, in Biran, 2009) and *Si Pitoeng* (Wong, 1931b, in Biran, 2009)—or present, as with *Indonesia Malaise* (Wong, 1931a, in Biran, 2009). By focusing on indigenous characters—even those penned by non-indigenes—indigenous audiences, it could be assumed, would more easily identify with characters and thus better enjoy the films.

The indigenous target audience is also evident in the films' presentation of subject material. Both versions of *Njai Dasima* eliminated the anti-Islamic undertones of G. Francis' original novel to avoid offending their target audience (Siegel, 1997); this revision may be partly attributed to the influence of existing stage (*lenong*) adaptations of the story (Woodrich, forthcoming).

Film titles also indicate a conscious effort to target native audiences: *Lari ka Arab* was initially meant to be titled *Lari ka Makkah* [*Fleeing to Mecca*], a clear effort to draw Muslim audiences. *Indonesia Malaise*, meanwhile, used the political term "Indonesia", which was supported by the mostly indigenous nationalist movement (Kristanto, 2007).

Unlike the Dutch-made film about the indigenous peoples of Indonesia, however, these films avoided ethnography and focused on persons living in urban areas. Both iterations of *Njai Dasima* (Tan & Lie, 1929/1930 and Tan & Effendi, 1932, in Biran, 2009), for instance, were set in Batavia, as were *Si Ronda* (Tan & Lie, 1930b, in Biran, 2009) and *Indonesia Malaise* (Wong, 1931a). *Melati van Agam* (Tan & Lie, 1930a, in Kwee, 1930c), meanwhile, was set in the Sumatran city of Fort de Kock (now known as Bukittinggi), as well as in Banda Aceh, Aceh. This focus on urban locations may be attributed, at least in part, to the assumption that audiences in urban areas where the cinemas were located would have been more interested in stories with a similar setting, or the understanding that indigenous audiences neither wanted nor required the ethnographic imagery that so enthralled Europeans.

The Case of Pareh

One of the most significant films produced in the Indonesian archipelago in the 1930s, *Pareh* [Rice] (Balink & Franken, 1936), represents an interesting case. The film was a joint production of Albert Balink, a Eurasian journalist born in the Netherlands who had lived in the Indies since the 1920s, and Mannus Franken, a Dutch filmmaker credited with directing numerous short films in the Netherlands—including the avant-garde documentary *Regen* [*Rain*] in collaboration with Joris Ivens in 1929—before going to the Indies to work with Balink. This unlikely pair, a populist and a cineaste, combined strategies to reach a diverse target audience with a story that was set in rural Java and focused on two lovers who must overcome their village's superstitions before they can be together.

According to Wong, Balink sought to cast amateur indigene actors and actresses of certain type, going so far as to chase after a young *priyayi* [person of noble heritage] named Mochtar to offer him the main role (Biran, 2009). Franken, meanwhile, was insistent not only on including ethnographic sequences in the film—the opening scene of which features

a farmer riding a water buffalo as he tills a wet rice field—but also on controlling how these scenes were filmed. Ultimately, Franken handled cinematography for ethnographic sequences, while Joshua and Othniel Wong worked as cameramen for other scenes (Biran, 2009). In an interview in the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* ["Mannus Franken geïnterviewd", 1936], Franken emphasized the importance of ethnographic footage:

> There is a real interest in Indies customs, territory which is little unfamiliar with us and senior indigenous people assure us has the attention of the Indies population. So in this movie, in "Pareh", we have nothing which is against *adat* [customary law]. We have now, for example, the support of the regents of Bandung and Garut. In "Pareh" we have, among other things, the sanctification of a kris, which is bathed in water, and a native burial. (p. 7)[13]

Upon its release, *Pareh* (Balink & Franken, 1936) was given the Dutch-language subtitle *een rijstlied van Java* [*a song of rice from Java*], offering Dutch audiences—particularly those in the Netherlands, where the film was processed and first screened—a melodic and artful glimpse at the exotic, agrarian society. *Pareh*'s credits and advertisements in the Netherlands emphasized Franken's role, positioning him as both cinematographer and director and thus capitalizing on his reputation as a serious filmmaker. In the Indies, meanwhile, Mochtar was credited as Raden Mochtar, using a noble title to capitalize on his heritage—still of considerable value in the Indies—despite his family having already abandoned it (Biran, 2009).

In an interview, Franken said that the film was meant both to meet the needs of indigenous audiences and to pique the interest of European and American audiences ("Mannus Franken geïnterviewd, 1936"). Indeed, *Pareh* was warmly received by critics, both indigene intelligentsia and European, and its technical prowess inspired later producers to pay greater attention to technical details (Biran, 2009).

This popularity among critics, however, was not enough to ensure commercial viability, a particular concern owing to the *Pareh*'s considerable cost of 75,000 gulden— twenty times as much as other domestic productions (Biran, 2009). Lower class indigenous audiences, the greatest market segment in the Indies, avoided the film, and even its star Mochtar did not view the film in its entirety. The indigene intelligentsia, in particular, took issue with the film's ethnographic sequences: though Pane (1955) considered *Pareh*'s technical aspects unparalleled in the early domestic film industry, he derided the film's depiction of indigenes as "primitive". *Pareh* ultimately bankrupted

its makers, forcing Balink to spend the next several years seeking investors for his film *Terang Boelan*, a film for lower class indigenous audiences.

Considering the Role of Ethnicity

Filmmakers in two of the above categories tended to produce and direct films targeted at audiences of the same ethnic group as themselves. An "ethnic alliance"—a show of solidarity between persons of the same ethnic background—may have been one consideration for such a practice. Continued differentiation of ethnic groups, formally supported by the colonial government, had led to the development of distinct tastes and language uses. Filmmakers of a certain ethnicity could be more familiar with the tastes of their own ethnic group, and thus more easily make films for the consumption of their own ethnic groups. The Teng Chun, for instance, had grown up in the Indies and was familiar with the increasingly pro-Chinese cultural orientation of the Chinese in the Indies, as marked by the emergence of cultural organizations such as the Tiong Hoa Hwe Koan, as well as their inability to speak Mandarin (Biran, 2009). He used this knowledge to meet audience demand for films dealing with Chinese culture—often, in this case, Chinese legends—but using Malay. The's company survived the Great Depression while others faltered.

The possibility of an "ethnic alliance" as a contributing factor should not be understood solely in the context of the ethnic groupings "Dutch" and "Chinese"; each category should be further divided. The "Dutch" group, for example, included both persons of mixed descent and those who (at least claimed) purely European heritage. The "Chinese" group, meanwhile, included both the *peranakan*—persons who "are of mixed descent, whose families have settled in [the Indies] for at least three generations, who may have had some Chinese language school education but do not speak Chinese as the home language (Tan, 2008)—and the *totok*—persons of Chinese heritage and cultural orientation who migrated to the Indies less than three generations prior (Tan, 2008). Producers' affiliations within these sub-categories may have contributed to their target audiences. For instance, Tan Khoen Yauw, who targeted his films mainly at indigenous audiences, had well-developed ties with the indigenous community, whereas The Teng Chun, who in this period targeted his films mainly at Chinese audiences, was raised in a Chinese cultural context and had lived and worked in China before becoming a filmmaker.

Another consideration was almost certainly potential profits. According to the 1930 census of the Dutch East Indies (van Nimwegen, 2002), persons of European descent, including both "pure" Europeans and Eurasians, represented only 0.4% (240,417 persons) of the total population (60,727,233 persons). The ethnic Chinese, meanwhile, represented 2.0% or 1,233,214

persons. The indigenes were most populous group, making up 97.4% or 59,138,067 persons. Total possible ticket sales for indigenous audiences may thus have made up for lower ticket prices; a film that was successful with indigenous audiences had the potential to earn more despite indigenous audiences having less disposable income than ethnic Chinese or European ones (Biran, 2009). This is particularly clear with *Njai Dasima* (1929/1930), the period's most commercially successful domestically produced film: the profit from a single screening could make up for several days' losses (Biran, 2009). Tan's Film Company, the studio that produced *Njai Dasima*, became the first studio owned by Chinese Indonesians to complete more than one film, and the company even produced the first sequel in Indonesia, *Nancy Bikin Pembalesan* in 1930 (Biran, 2009).

Interestingly, filmmakers from ethnic groups with the capital to produce their own films did not target each other: European filmmakers did not make films for ethnic Chinese audiences, and ethnic Chinese filmmakers did not create films for European audiences. Though the concept of "ethnic alliance" and the market implications of the Indies' demographics offer potential (partial) explanations—the smaller European and ethnic Chinese markets may not have been easy to break into, and their size may have meant that they did not offer the potential financial returns of the indigenous majority—these may not have been the only ones. Politics may have also played a role.

As mentioned above, persons of European descent were at the top of the social hierarchy in the Indies, with persons of Chinese descent below them, and the indigene population at the bottom. Though there were cases of upward social mobility within this hierarchy—for instance, an indigenous person receiving equal legal standing as a Dutchman—these cases were rare and imperfect as individuals in such situations still faced strong social stigma. Downward social mobility was more tenable; entrepreneurs of all ethnicities had regular business interactions with indigenous consumers. It is thus possible that filmmakers were hesitant to engage viewers from groups of a relatively high social standing, especially when these ethnic groups produced their own films. However, this possibility can neither be confirmed nor denied by available contemporary documentation.

In and of themselves, these social factors could not have fully determined a film's targeted audiences. They fail to explain, for example, how the Wong brothers ultimately made films for indigenous audiences despite being first-generation migrants to the Indies, completing part of their education in China, and originally making films for Chinese audiences.

It is thus likely that personal considerations had an influence. Individual filmmakers may, for instance, have wanted to adapt stories already aimed

at specific audiences rather than risk a bigger investment experimenting on untested stories. Filmmakers may have wanted to obtain greater social capital by investing in industries already identified with modernity; both Tan Khoen Yauw and Jo Eng Sek were owners of large shops (Biran, 2009). Some filmmakers may have intended to earn sufficient funds through commercial filmmaking to allow them to produce other, less commercial films, which were of greater personal interest. Unfortunately, documents reflecting these and other possible personal considerations have not been located; interviews found in contemporary media focus on filmmakers' thoughts on their audiences' interests.

While films may have purposefully aimed to engage a specific ethnic group, as seen above audiences were frequently mixed. It was not impossible—as in the case of *De Stem des Bloeds*—for majority of the viewers to be part of other ethnic groups. Such was the extent of this intermingling that several films offered intertitles in multiple languages (Kwee, 1930a). Though no surveys of contemporary audiences have been found to explain this phenomenon, several factors may have played a role: film productions provided spectacle, the joy of seeing images of people and places move, along with popular stories. This spectacle contributed to the ethnographizing tendencies of European filmmakers and was manifested through the inclusion of action and/or beautiful locations. *Si Tjonat* (Jo, 1929, as cited in Kwee, 1930b), for instance, manifested spectacle by adding a scene in which its main character fights bandits on the Priangan (Banten) coast, despite such a scene not being in the source novel.

Importantly, this spectacle of film was not enjoyed in private, but rather in a group setting, allowing shared experiences and the formation of stronger social bonds. By viewing films, which were at the forefront of modern European technology, audiences could feel and, in this group setting, portray themselves as being modern and worth no less than members of the higher classes. Audiences could likewise fulfill what Siegel (1997) describes as the drive to "feel the currents of world communication" (p. 93) and realize a place in the global community.

Conclusion

Following the success of *Terang Boelan*, a 1937 film by Albert Balink for indigene audiences, ethnic Chinese filmmakers in Indonesia began focusing primarily on indigenous audiences. Between 1939 and 1942, almost all feature films produced in Indonesia fell into this category; European filmmakers either left Indonesia or focused on documentaries.[14] Films produced by ethnic Chinese for indigenous audiences remained prominent into the 1950s, even after the rise of Indonesian filmmakers such

as Usmar Ismail and Djamaluddin Malik. Productions by these Chinese filmmakers have, however, remained little studied. Most histories have focused on the films of Usmar Ismail's company Perfini (Perusahaan Film Nasional Indonesia, Indonesian National Film Company) and Djamaluddin Malik's company Persari (Persatuan Artis Indonesia, Indonesian Artists' Company). Today, films continue to be made by ethnic Chinese filmmakers for Indonesians, though the discourse of ethnicity is neither as prominent nor readily evident.

Although distinctions between filmmakers of different ethnic backgrounds are no longer as clearly cut, they still affect how Indonesian cinema is defined. Histories of Indonesian cinema, such as those written by Said (1982) and Biran (1982, 2009), have used both ethnicity and national identity to establish a nativist canon, thus marginalizing works produced in the Indonesian archipelago by persons of non-indigenous descent. Despite recent attempts by scholars to date the inception of Indonesian cinema by identifying the earliest representations of nationalism in films produced by ethnic Chinese filmmakers (Setijadi-Dunn and Barker, 2011) or penned by indigenous screenwriters (Woodrich, 2015), popular discourse continues to recognize *Darah dan Doa* (Ismail, 1950) as the first Indonesian film. Further research can build on the findings presented here regarding the earliest years of film production in the Indonesian archipelago and, ultimately, provide a better understanding of the role of ethnicity in pre-Indonesian cinema.

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Endnotes

[1] Further factors contributing to the loss of most of the films produced in Indonesia—and even in Indonesia through the 1960s (see Sen, 2006)—include the difficulty of storing film in the archipelago's tropical climate; the accidental destruction of films owing to fire such as the (such as the Produksi Film Nasional [National Film Production Company] warehouse fire of 1952, (see Biran, 2012); the deliberate destruction of films in response to changing political situations such as the destruction of Bachtiar Siagian's oeuvre (cf. van Heeren, 2012); and destruction of film due to producers' displeasure with the finished product, as with *Hampir Malam di Djogja* [*Almost Night in Jogja*] (1951). No catalogue of extant Indonesian films has been written.

At least one film from the period studied here is known to have survived: *Pareh* (Balink & Franken, 1936), which was stored in the Netherlands and has been distributed in DVD format among film clubs in Jakarta.

[2] This was likely the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Films were popularly screened in much of the Malay archipelago (Tofighian, 2013).

[3] Original Malay: *Harep dateng siang nanti tida kedapetan tempat doedoek* ("Wilhelmina Bioscope program," 1909).

[4] No women are recorded as producers or directors in the Dutch East Indies, though there were numerous actresses who rose to popularity. In general, women have had a minimal role behind the scenes in the Indonesian film industry, though that has changed since the 1990s. See Swestin (2012) for discussion of women's roles in the Indonesian film industry since independence.

[5] No relation to Nelson, Othniel, and Joshua, who were brothers (Biran, 2009)

[6] "Writing" here should not be understood as screenwriting. The practice began with *Njai Dasima* (1932), a talkie remake of the 1929 production. Writing refers to a short summary or treatment. In the

early years of the film industry, actors were told what scene was being shot and how their character would act. Dialogue was largely improvised. This was a continuation of the system used by both the *bangsawan* and *komedi stamboel* theatrical troupes (Woodrich, forthcoming).

[7] The title *Karnadi Anemer* comes from an article on the Indonesian film industry written by M. Esha in the 1970s based on his recollections. Woodrich (forthcoming) argues that this film was released under the title *Roesia Gadis Priangan* [*Secret of the Girl from Priangan*]. He refers to contemporary advertisements and a censorship case involving the film similar to that recorded for *Karnadi Anemer Bangkong*.

[8] Original Dutch: *"… ook de Indische Filmindustrie in staat is mooie speelfilms te maken"* ("Eulis Atjih," 1927a, p. 7).

[9] Original: "*Liat bagimana bangsa Indonesia tjoekoep pinter maen di dalem film, tida kerang dari laen matjem film dari Europa atawa Amerika*" ("Eulis Atjih," 1927b, n.p.).

[10] Contemporary sources do not explicitly confirm this story. As noted elsewhere (Woodrich, forthcoming), Krugers faced censorship and public outcry from indigenous audiences for a scene in *Roesia Gadis Priangan*. The resulting court case dragged on over several months, though ultimately Krugers was not found guilty.

[11] According to Biran (2009), Liem Goan Lian and Tjan Tjoen Lian owned South Sea Film, the production company which first began producing *Lily van Java*. David Wong, a General Motors employee in Batavia, gave further funding to the production after it was put on hold. To what extent these individuals exerted creative control, relative each other, is uncertain, and many aspects of the film remain disputed.

[12] Original Malay: "*Kita poenja maksoed boekan boeat terbitken film jang memoeaskan bangsa Tionghoa atawa Eropa, hanja teroetama soepaja bisa tarik penonton-penonton Boemipoetra jang dari klas moera; maka kita perloe pilih tjerita-tjerita jang dirasa bisa disoekai oleh Boemipoetra dan diatoer begitoe roepa hingga djadi tjotjok dengan kasoekaannja penonton dari itoe golongan*" (Kwee, 1929b, p. 1199).

[13] Original Dutch: *"Er is werkelijke belangstelling voor Indische zeden en gewoonten, die een voor ons te weinig bekend terrein openleggen, terwijl aan den anderen kant hooggeplaatste inheemsche medewerkers ons de aandacht der Indische bevolking verzekeren. Er komt in deze films niets voor, dat tegen de adat is en bij „Pareh" hebben wij b.v. den steun gehad van de regenten van Bandoeng en Garoet. In „Pareh" werd o. a. geheel in het verband der speelhandeling opgenomen het heiligen van een kris, het baden in het water dat daardoor geheiligd is, het zoeken van de moederrijst, een inlandsche begrafenis*" ("Mannus Franken geïnterviewd", 1936, p. 7).

[14] The sole exception listed by Kristanto (2007) is *Sorga Palsoe* [*False Paradise*] (The & Tan, 1940). The film follows the dynamics of an ethnic Chinese family; it was written by Fred Young, was directed by Tan Tjoei Hock, and was produced by The Teng Chun.

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