

# Genres of Crime Fiction in Indonesia'

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*"In the meantime, the acquaintance with European prose-literature has brought about a further positive result. A number of talented people have successfully tried to creatively produce such work on their own. Thus, several publications have appeared that introduced this innovation to the indigenous literature in a very positive way."* (Rinkes 1923:184)<sup>2</sup>

When the novel as a genre emerged in the Netherlands East Indies in the 19th century, it was very much approved by the colonials. In the first decades of this century it quickly developed into the predominant literary form. The western educational or psychological novel in particular was fully supported, actually launched, by the Dutch, whereas its counterpart ---crime fiction--- did not find a warm welcome. On the contrary, the indigenous population fancied the latter genre. Hence, crime fiction<sup>s</sup> flourished despite colonial opposition, though well under western influence.

Numerous translations and adaptations of European detective stories came first (mainly Sherlock Holmes stories). These were followed by 'original' indigenous crime novels, initially written and published in Malay *by peranakan* Chinese, then by Sumatran and also Javanese authors and publishers. The Dutch publisher

even produced a series of Malay crime novels. Some Dutch and Eurasians wrote crime novels, too, in the Dutch language and with a colonial setting.

Under the Japanese Occupation the genre seemed to have vanished completely. There were hardly any crime novels until the late fifties. First, weekly magazines started to feature so-called 'crime reports'. Eventually, the subsequent success of the Indonesian serials *Naga Mas* and *Garuda Putih* revitalized the genre. These were slowly superseded by Javanese crime novels in the sixties. Authors like Any Asmara and Suparto Brats, just to mention two, dominated this field of popular literature for about a decade. For reasons still unknown, the genre ceased again in the seventies. Only a smaller number of Agatha Christie titles, translated and published by *Gramedia*, seemed present on the literary market. Hino Minggo's indigenous 'super-spy' *Six Balanx* is probably the first successful crime serial in Indonesian since the fifties. As the success of the Javanese crime

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank Pramoedya Ananta Toer who as one of the first has drawn people's attention to the wide range of the "assimilatief" (1963) literature of pre-war Indonesia which had not been given due recognition so far. This article summarizes some results of a research project that is being conducted by the author and financed by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*. The comparative study focuses on conflicts between literary genres in the context of intercultural contact. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the project, some parts of the article deal with more general literary aspects.

<sup>2</sup> *"Intusschen / weft de kennismaking met de Europeesche roman-litteratuur nog een ander gelukkig resultaat gehad, en wel dat enkele begaafde personen getracht hebben, zelfstandig inventief tot samenstelling to geraken; aldus zijn bereids enkele werken verschenen, die deze innovatie in de Inlandsche litteratuur op gelukkige wijze hebben ingezet."*

<sup>a</sup> Terms such as *crime fiction*, *novel* or *story* certainly ask for further discussion, especially when they are used in the context of literary genres. Despite the ambiguity of the terms, they will be provisionally used here.

novel declined during the seventies, a few of the Javanese authors (eg. Suparto Brata, Djokolelono) finally also published in Indonesian. About the same time, Arswendo Atmowiloto introduced the Indonesian crime novel for the young, starring a Jakarta youngster named *Imung*. This series was enormously popular, also among adult readers (and only stopped due to the author's imprisonment). Once more, crime fiction seemed to endure a severe loss of popularity. The genre had almost come to a standstill, when recently two Indonesian Chinese women writers climbed the best seller lists with their novels: Marga T. and S. Mara GD. There, they share the company of Agatha Christie, whose novels have all been translated into Indonesian by *Gramedia* by now. It seems, however, that crime fiction nowadays needs the label 'mystery' to be successful."

So far, little consideration has been given to the broad field of popular culture, eg. popular literature, almost none, if it comes to popular literature in the context of intercultural confrontation. In the case of Indonesia, the cultural confrontation is not merely one between two cultural frames, East and West, colonizers and colonized, but includes numerous other 'value systems'. As a consequence, the mechanisms of cultural change are just as complex.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the phenomena of consensualizing processes are not only to be witnessed within one cultural unit, but are to be stated within and between the western and eastern frames of culture, as well as within and between the numerous ethnic groups of Indonesia.

The material still available from the colonial period is amazingly abundant and give clear hints that, for instance, the Indonesian crime novels bear unique features. Nevertheless, only a very small number of Indonesian crime novels have been mentioned so far in contemporary scholarship and no research has been done to date on the crime novel and its relation to other genres in Indonesia.<sup>6</sup> A case study as such offers insight into the process of cultural change intensified by the fact of intercultural encounter.

## The novel as a genre

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the novel in Europe developed into one of the main mediums of image forming self-reflection for the middle classes. The 'educational novel' in particular succeeded in overcoming traditional literary forms which had proved insufficient to articulate the new world views adequately. The civilizing transition from exterior to self-control found its fictionalized expression in the form of this genre. The novel also gave literary shape to the idea of

<sup>4</sup> The discussion above merely depicts the 'waves of popularity' of the crime novel. Further in-depth study, particularly on the genre after 1945, is required.

<sup>5</sup> Whenever two or more societies encounter, their cultural networks are challenged respectively. All social forces struggling for hegemony within their own cultural frame have then to react upon the hegemonial processes within the other cultural networks. The 'cultural niches' resulting from these processes, ask for occupation and are to be shaped anew (R.Williams,1977; A.Memmi,1980 ).

See Teeuw (1979), Salmon (1981), Quinn (1992). To my knowledge, there has been only one approach to the topic *crime fiction* so far. In 1986/87 Sri Widati Pradopo, Faruk HT. and others compiled and analysed postwar Javanese crime novels. The results have been published by the Department of Education for internal use only.

continuity and evolution, which up to now links every social progress to the concept of individuality (Wild 1982).

A look at the diverging narrative structures gives an idea of the different world models that collided in the Netherlands East Indies. In contrast to the western novel, the traditional indigenous forms of literature do not favour strict stringency and continuity. The Javanese epics, to mention one example, preferably allow innumerable strings of action to mix, melt, separate, and sometimes to become lost altogether. The logic of narrative seems, at least according to western standards, inconsistent. Most striking for western readers might be the fact that no individual life story dominates the plot, for no individual is considered to be of such importance that he or she is accepted as the centre of attention.

The narrative structure of the western novel reproduces an interpretation of the world, which is determined by its own history of mentalities. The educational novel in particular embodies the longing for clarity, the unshakable belief in the developmental capability of any individual, and hence the wish to master each and every conflict or crisis. Crisis, failure, and social utopia all lay in the individual itself. The educational novel represents a strong desire to heal the world by the metamorphosis of the fragmented subject into an ego of entity and integrity, the presumed existence of which has been inspiring the minds of the western middle classes for centuries.'


The individualization of literary experience is, strictly speaking, contradictory to the traditional collectivity of Indonesian societies. How, then, was it possible that the genre of the novel could have met with such a great acceptance?

Comparable to the European novel (only in a much shorter period of time), the genre emerged in the Netherlands East Indies when the traditional literary forms proved to be no longer sufficient as a medium of cultural communication. Due to the radical social and economic changes that took place in the Netherlands East Indies around the turn of the century, the indigenous literature had to adapt itself to the new situation. New appropriate forms had not yet fully developed. For a short period, no dominant literary form existed. The remarkable variety of literary experiments on the indigenous market at that time signifies the search for applicable forms of expression and communication. The form of the western novel was also part of those experiments. Stories of Chinese, Indian and Arab origin, as well as English, French or German titles were adapted or translated into Malay and other indigenous languages. Apart from those, an ever increasing number of indigenous novels appeared on the market, reshaping the western pattern.

The aim of the indigenous authors was seemingly to produce a synthesis of 'modern' and 'traditional' elements, which can be stated for the whole range of religious to nationalist literature. The western novel could convey myths of the ancestors, and criminal events were dressed in the traditional *syair* or lyric. To combine elements of entertainment with those of enlightenment was one of the most explicitly declared intentions. One peculiar example is the humorous

story *Trio Idoeng Belang* by Si Kaloeng (1931). The foreword expresses the publisher's apology for the sometimes less than appropriate language used in the text, but "we deliberately leave it in order to illustrate the real situation and events, so that the reader may reflect and consider, whether such behaviour and action have to be like this in our society and our lives". In case the readers' children behaved as described in the text, the parents should "correct, and educate, so that the children become more superior"!

A conspicuous role in the field of literature was played by the *majalah roman* (or *roman picisan*, as they were disparagingly called later). During the second half of the twenties, these journals of popular literature started to mushroom. They were initially published in Sino-Malay by *peranakan* Chinese, were usually 60 to 100 pages long, and contained *silat*, love stories, as well as a great deal of crime fiction. They reached high circulation figures and resembled the American *pulps*, popular journals of the twenties which contained 'trivial' stories or 'novelettes' of crime and romance. The titles of both the Chinese and Sumatran Malay *madjalah roman* later, however, formulate a different self-image from that of the very successful American *pulps*. The titles, carefully chosen and openly discussed with the readership<sup>9</sup> were nothing like *Black Mask*, but rather *Pengalaman Doenia* (World Experience), *Penghidoean* (Life), *Loekisan Poedjangga* (Painting by the Poet), or *Roman Pergaoelan* (Novel of Social Communication).

Both authors and publishers considered their task to be the modelling of a modern Indonesian literature, and a modern Indonesian society. "The literature of our people is still too limited and the Indonesian library still very poor. Thus, besides the publication of books and book-selling, we also publish *Roman Pergaoelan*, for no other reason than to enrich our people's library, and provide historical, political and detective stories which always contain educational elements, knowledge, criticism and so forth according to the tendencies in contemporary society'. They did not consider their literature to be mere 'reading-matter or entertainment and certainly did not look at it as literature of inferior quality. "This attempt in the field of art enriches our library, makes our literature more valuable, one attempt in the chapter of the magnificence and the rise of our *Peo* 

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<sup>8</sup> "Kita sengadja moeat boeat meloekiskan keadaan dan kedjadian fang sebenar-benarnja, dengan bagitoe soepaja pematja bisa timbang dan pikir, apa memang soedah saharoesnja kelakoean dan perboeatan demikian ada pada pergaoelan dan penghidoean kita-orang" "perbaekinlah, didiklah, soepaja itoe anak-anak djadi lebih oetama".

<sup>9</sup> In 1930, the journal *Penghidoean*, for instance, organized a competition on a grand scale, in order to discuss the philosophical meaning of the journal's name. A selection of letters to the editor were published at length (VI/15.4.1930/64:i-xxvii).

<sup>10</sup> "Literaturbangsa kita masih terlaloe koerang, dan perpoestakaan Indonesia masih sangat miskinnja, maka kami terbitkanlah poela "ROMAN PERGAOELAN" disamping penerbitan boekoe-boekoe dan boekhandel, tidak lain hanyalah hen& k memperkaja perpoestakaan bangsa kits (...) ROMAN PERGAOELAN, akan menjadikan tjerita-tjerita History, Politiek, dan Detective-romans fang senantiasa mengandoeng pendidikan, pengetahoean, kritik dan sebagainja menoeroet aliran masjarakat (pergaoelan) sehari-hari" (*Roman Pergaoelan* 1-1939-1).

<sup>11</sup> "Oesaha ini, dalam lapangan kesenian, memperkaja perpoestakaan, mempertinggi kesoe-sastraan kita, salah satoe oepaja dalam tjabang kentoeliaan dan kebangkitan bangsa" (editorial *Doenia Pengalaman* Juni 1939).

Not only the Sumatran publishers stressed their aim to contribute to a national literature — disregarding here the multiple meanings of the term 'national'. *"Mizaan Doenia leads in the direction of the glorious battlefield of progress, joins the rows of soldiers already there in form of other novels, and it also adds to the treasury of great Indonesia's literature, as well as to the greatness of its arts; literature of this modern and crucial century"*. The author, or rather *poedjangga*, was supposed to "(...) arrange his words in a fine, soft way, each publication containing guidance, psychology, sociology, philosophy, for instance, an example or metaphor picturing the 'chessboard' of life and living of the people in present-day society. It is necessary to serve the benefit of progress" -

At the end of 1939, approximately 240 publishers, authors or journalists who were involved in the production of *madjallah roman met* in Medan to discuss whether the novels they produced were indeed of use for the society or not. As a result of this "*konperensi Roman*" (Tamar Djaja 1955:209), it was stated that the publication of novels must not be diminished, but increased. The novel (*roman*) could be used to refine the language, to make people read, as well as to convey propaganda and criticism (*Roman Pergaoelan* Dec.1939-1). In this context, the process of 'literary discrimination of genres by, for instance, trivialization (as practised by Balai Poestaka) deserves special attention.

The search for identity, without interference from the colonial side, did not last long. Definitely, by the time the *Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur* was founded, the colonial power abandoned its attitude of indifference and attempted to control the indigenous literature as completely as possible. Some colonial officials declared their firm intention to establish the 'educational novel' as the predominant genre in the Netherlands East Indies. The psychological nature of the novel made it - not only in the eyes of DA.Rinkes -- a most appropriate sociopolitical means. It was meant to create, distribute and implant social roles and affirmative patterns of behaviour among the indigenous population (Jedamski 1992).

The following quotation referring to Javanese literature reveals the insight which the Dutch had into the potentials of literary genres:

*"What consequences these rather fast changes of the Javanese prijaai have already shown or will show with regard to the personal sphere of any modern Javanese intellectual in the Netherlands East Indies is difficult to generalize. One would like to see such development being portrayed in a psychological novel. To date, there has been no Javanese writer discovered who could*

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*"Mizaan Doenia membimbing arah medan kemadjoean djaja, mengiringi lasjkarnja fang soedah ada barisanja dalam pembatjaan roman lain lain, dan tambah mengisi lagi perbendaharaan kepoestakaan di Indonesia raja Berta tingginja kesenian, kesoesastraan diabad berloka modern genting ini (editorial, Mizaan Doenia 1941).*

<sup>18</sup> "(...) toetoer katanja terdjalin haloes loenglai, tiap terbit berisi toentoenan, Psychologie, Sociologie, Philosophie, oetama tantsil peribaratana fang mengenai pertjatoeran hidoep dan kehidoepanan manoesia disoesasana masjarakat hari-hari. Perloekanlah serta toeroet oentoek dan goena kemadjoean" (editorial, *Mizaan Doenia* 1941).

produce such a novel".<sup>14</sup>

It is worth noting that the Dutch did not seem to be interested in simply imposing their own literary socialization upon the Indonesians. No so-called 'high literature' was ever chosen to be translated, for even the western educated elite was considered to be immature and therefore unable to appreciate the "fruits of European literature" (Balai Poestaka 1930:8). On the other hand, titles from the 'substructure' of the literary hierarchy, the 'trivial' or popular literature, were by and large considered dangerous because of their 'immoral', 'erotic' or 'sensational' elements, a judgement that also included the *madjalah roman*.

As a matter of course, the selection of the texts made available to the Indonesians was strongly affected by the educational background of the Dutch officials in charge. So, it turns out that most of the titles to be translated were from 'acceptable entertaining literature' of the 19th century -- the 'middle layer of western literary hierarchy' -- among them quite a number of adventure stories such as *Graaf de Monte Christo* or *Treasure Island*.

In the first place, these adventure stories were a mere compromise made out of competitive reasons with regard to the indigenous literary market. When it shows that despite all efforts, the educational or psychological novel only developed hesitantly, these 'middle-layer products' were set as examples to be imitated -- at least by all indigenous authors working for Balai Poestaka. As a result of this 'guided development', it can be noted that the accepted western entertaining literature has become an established part of the 'high literature' of Indonesia.

These observations, however, evoke several questions. The model of literary hierarchy sufficiently describes the aspect of evaluation that was attached to a text or genre in a certain historical and social context by the dominant social groups. It does not explain why the Dutch colonials would tolerate, even propagate adventure stories, but at the same time oppose all (non-classical) crime fiction. The Dutch colonials obviously made a clear distinction between the adventure novel and the crime novel, to the disadvantage of the latter: a fact that cannot be explained by their stand within the literary hierarchy, according to which both types of texts generally belong to the same category of entertaining literature of inferior artistic quality. It seems helpful now to undertake an excursion into the field of genre theory.

## Genres as world models

Recent approaches in the field of Germanic studies offer an applicable tool. The following hypothesis can function as a theoretical starting point: Each literary genre is, strictly speaking, an epistemological or cognitive conception. According to the basic human desire to structure world experience, genres provide 'orientation, that is to say, a means to simplify the complexity of possibilities (of

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Welke gevolgen dRze, vrij snel (...) zich voltrekkende verandering van de Javaanse prija-stand in de moderne Indisch-Nederlandse intellectuelen-stand van Javaansen bloede voor het persoonlijke Leven van de betrokkenen betekent of betekenen zal, is moeilijk in het algemeen te zeggen. Men zou zulk een ontwikkeling in een psychologische roman beschreven willen zien. Tot dusver is de Javaanse schrijver, die zulk een roman schrijven kan, echter nog niet ontdekt" (Pigeaud 1941:605).

thought) and to make them easier to survey (not only in the literary context). The consolidation of any media-genre in any society is tantamount to the affirmation, strengthening or modification of a consensualized world view -- a construction of reality (Schmidt 1987;1989).

Thus, the exclusion of texts from certain genres means the rejection of attitudes and views which do not fit in any of the accepted constructions of reality (Steinmetz 1979:73). This assessment is transferable to the rejection of a whole genre by parts of or an entire society. Accordingly, genres represent "*literary-social institutions*" and "*historically determined forms of communication*" (Voskamp 1977:27). Genres are no supra-historical invariables and by no means universal, neither are the principles of structure which they stand for they are sociohistorically defined phenomena. Which factors, one has to ask, determine the 'readability' of a genre? How is the emergence, acceptance and rejection of a genre in a certain society at a certain time explicable? How is the "*standing of the single genre within the literary and social context as a whole*" (idem:31)?

On the example of the German *Bildungsroman* (educational novel), demonstrates the ambiguity of the *genre* concept (1991). He argues that the conception of genres -- particularly with respect to contents, motives and themes -- depends so much on the respective historical context that the categorization of texts by way of genres is actually not practical. Any categorization of texts seems only reasonable, if the "*rhetorical structure*" of texts as the least instable element functions as the categorizing feature. The concept of 'genres' should, so he suggests, be substituted by "*models of presentation and argumentation*" (310). As a consequence, Laufhütte categorizes the *Bildungsroman* according to its basic structure as a "*narrative following the biography model claiming exemplary character*" (313). The *Bildungsroman* thus represents only one of many possible historical realizations of the 'biographical model', all other realizations have their own range of variations respectively (310).

With the help of this approach, the complex literary development in Indonesia gains transparency. As already stated above, the Dutch colonials never transferred any western *Bildungsroman*, no educational novel in its strictest sense, neither were any titles belonging to the upper layer of the literary hierarchy distributed. The colonial officials were convinced that no indigenous reader would be in a state to understand and enjoy, for instance, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*. (As the Indonesians obviously did understand and enjoy Tolstoi, Hugo, de Maupassant and Wilde that argument certainly deserves to be questioned.) On the other hand, the Dutch colonials despised literature that did not correspond with their ideas of literary or moral quality -- and therefore did not rank with 'real literature' at all. They genuinely meant to slowly improve the 'literary taste' of the Indonesians, provided that it stayed in line with the requirements of colonial power and that it corresponded with the assumed intellectual faculties of the indigenous readers.

Under these preconditions, Balai Poestaka created a new text model based on the structure of 'biographical narratives claiming exemplary character for the Indonesians: the 'modern Indonesian novel'. The main themes taken were education, forced marriages, and conflicts between generations and traditions. These stories, centering on fictitious individuals, in the end demonstrated the advantages of Dutch rule and subtly affirmed the inferiority of the Indonesians. This type of educational novel 'educated' the Indonesians not to question their positions

within the colonial hierarchy, but to accept it. All these 'exemplary biographies' published by the Dutch colonials did propagate that the individual is to be seen as the key to the world and can even change it, but that it had better not try to do so in the Netherlands East Indies.

While Balai Poestaka tried to establish its model of the educational novel, the strong demand for adventure and crime novels on the indigenous market could no longer be neglected. The understanding of 'genre' as described above helps to understand why, under these circumstances, Balai Poestaka accepted and supported adventure stories, but had strong objections against crime novels. The basic structure of any adventure story actually corresponds with the educational novel. Both are 'exemplary biographies', they tell an individual (life-)story, and both convey the idea of individuality and the notion that the individual is equipped with all it needs to cope with life. The educational novel, however, represents the 'sophisticated' model. It accentuates the high moral and literary standards of the western bourgeoisie and stands for the ideal, the perfection of bourgeois life. The adventure story reflects the other side of the coin: the failure and the frustration of the bourgeois individual that cannot live up to his or her own expectations. Escape and comfort is sought in a strong, invulnerable hero, who solves all problems just by himself, who is both friend and master of nature, who in one person combines wits, strength and power to conquer the world. Although the high moral standards are dropped, and 'literary quality' ignored, the focus is still on the individual (and its capacities). The adventure story allows the tortured individual to enjoy all kinds of fantasies of revenge.

At no time did Balai Poestaka ever oppose romance or adventure stories as harshly as it fought crime fiction. Its trivialization was a means, not a cause for the rejection. What makes the crime novel so different from the adventure story? Some reduce it to the persecution of crime and the interpretation of material evidence. Another approach defines the crime novel as serving as an outlet for *instincts* suppressed by civilization. So does the adventure story as already shown above. Another theory sees in detective novels the secularized form of religious texts: one single person is punished in order to redeem the guilty rest. (On the surface, of course, a criminal only received his or her well-deserved sentence.)

Yet a different kind of approach can be extracted from the genre discussion above, where it was stated that genres most of all describe the basic structure and function of texts. The *rhetorical structure* of crime fiction may hence be sketched as fragmentized individuals subordinated to and connected by a borderline situation caused by faked, planned or committed crime.

## The fragmentized individual

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<sup>15</sup> In this context, *Graaf de Monte Christo* by A. Dumas gives a very illustrative example for such a 'Super Ego'. It was also one of the most translated adventure novels in Indonesia. Various adaptations and imitations, but in particular one 'revised' Malay version (with a comment by the author), indicate that this genre experienced a different reception in colonial Indonesia than in Europe. A detailed analysis of this phenomenon will be included in my present research. See Kock (1990) for further information on functions of adventure literature.



Whereas the western educational novel -- and in its own way, the adventure story -- depicts the desperate attempt (and often failure) of the *Individual* to cope with these effects of industrialization, modernization, and technical progress, the crime novel condenses this world experience and offers its very own solution. The crime novel does not at all rely on the entity of the *Individual*. It even dissolves it.: Life stories are disassembled, the remaining fragments are completely subordinated to the logic of the plot. "*Characters in the detective novel are configurations consisting of loose soul particles, which subsequently are adapted by reason to its freely invented plot of the story*" (Kracauer 1971:122). The network of interaction counts more than the psyche of the *Individual*, the cast of the protagonists, the motives, and the deeds alone are relevant. On top of that, 'universal' values no longer guarantee hold and steadiness: anybody can be the murderer! Finally, the distressed *Individual* in despair turns to a professional 'world healer, the private investigator.

In police novels, the institution of the police comes forward as the order-restoring force. This subgenre persistently suggests that the prevalence of the police over crime would automatically lead to the general prevalence over social disorder and injustice. Despite this tempting perspective, the middle class reader held up his historically grown and deeply rooted distrust of this state organ of control. In his opinion, the guarantee of his private sphere had to come first.

Therefore, the classical detective story places all confidence on the distinguished, loyal and, most important, discreet Gentleman-detective a la Sherlock Holmes. He faces any menace and mystery solely with the silent weapons of the Enlightenment: observation, logic, rationale. Attention is drawn to the most inconspicuous details, and the *Individual* may feel relieved: nothing, however small and seemingly meaningless, would ever be deprived of its significance. The capability of close observation is, no doubt, ambiguous. It stands for the voyeur's view, "*lifting not only the top of every pot, but the roof of every house*" (Bloch 1965:244). It also stands for complete knowledge and control, both desired as much as feared by the *Individual*. With effortless ease, the Gentleman-detective demonstrates how the doubtful, self-conscious *Individual* could safely move in this complex world -- and even derive pleasure from the threatening flood of information pouring down on it. Sometimes, however, the 'super-brain' is supported by the fact that his creator spatially confines his and the other protagonists' field of activity to a remote cottage or castle, a hotel on an island or a ship on the ocean.

The hard-boiled crime novel, however, counts on the stern private-eye named Nick Carter or Sam Spade. He is neither kindly disposed towards the upper classes, nor is he particularly averse to the use of violence. He does not mind breaking the law, but he has a fine sense of justice. While his counterpart, the Gentleman-detective, rather remains seated (preferably in an armchair) and reduces any crime to a mere game of wit, this 'lone wolf' moves nimbly through any city-jungle.

Although the classical detective novel does sense the fractures and uncertainties of modern times, the final discernment remains denied here. "*Detective fiction (...) becomes a mirror to society. Through it we may see society's fears made most explicit*" (Winks 1980:7), but any thought of actively changing the world is banished. The delinquent is convicted, the evil vanquished, and the pseudo-certainty celebrated that even murder cannot destroy the (however morbid) social

order: a happy ending?

More or less all types of crime fiction<sup>16</sup> were imitated by Indonesian writers and loved by the Indonesian readership. Sherlock Holmes and the 'whodunnit' pattern, however, seemed to have drawn much attention indeed. A closer look at the indigenous novels in question, as well as at the editorials, suggests that neither the intellectual challenge nor the thrill of solving a most complicated puzzle by rationale turned this type of literature into one of the most favoured ones.

The indigenous authors well recognized and acknowledged the 'intellectual puzzle' as one of the most conspicuous features of the genre and therefore served its rules by constructing most unusual (and highly unlikely) crime cases. On the other hand, they did not put enough effort in keeping up the plausibility of the 'case'. Neither was the need often felt to explain the ways by which the detective got his information to eventually solve the case: information is just available. Readers with western reading habits may also get confused sometimes when the story focuses obviously on a tiny detail so that it just seems beyond any doubt to be of high importance. When the reader is still waiting for the detail to reveal its meaning, the author had probably long forgotten its existence.

Contests were organized by publishers under the motto: "*Siapa pemboenoeh-nja*" - Who is the murderer? Only, it did not seem to matter that the answer was given away in the foreword to the second part of the story, so that the reader was deprived of the tension created by the still unknown, and the joy the reader gets from guessing (a playful form of research also for non-academics).<sup>17</sup>

It is safe to assume that the genre gained popularity, because it offered new ways to express world views or rather "*structures of feelings*" (Williams 1977:1280. A statement by Yoesoef Sou'yb preceding the crime novel *Serikat Teh Gelap* by Manoe Toeri (1940) expresses the anxiety of the time: "*Life is full of all kinds of twisted secrets, hidden evil, - but like the maggot in the husk: to the outside world only the good-looking pile is visible. Every single incident that we encounter on the road of life is a pure riddle*".<sup>18</sup> Modern times made it so frighteningly easy to lose one's right track. "*The difference between good and evil is not even so thick as a hair. The slightest movement can cause us to slide from good to bad and the other way round*"<sup>19</sup>, as Romano puts it in his foreword to Pouw Kioe An's *Siti Djenar atawa Drama Prampokan Madioen* (1935).

Still, the authors hardly tried to find answers in psychological insights: neither the 'baddy' nor the 'goody' were allowed to elaborate on their inner feelings

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<sup>16</sup> According to most definitions, the genre is divided into several subgenres or types: eg. the classical and the hard-boiled detective novels as described above, the police novel, the spy and conspiracy novel, the gangster novel, the murder novel, the (explained) mystery novel.

See Bloch on this function of detective novels (1965:248). See the foreword to *Kang Lam Yan...? atawa Si Boeroeng Walet dari Kang Lam* by Ong Hap Djin (1929,11) for the competition *Siapa pemboenoehnja* (Who is the murderer?). See *Liberty* (V/Dez.1932/57) for a similar contest, which even offered prizes to be won.

<sup>18</sup> "*Hidoep ini penoeh oleh segala belitan rahsia, kedjahat jang tersemboenji, - tapi is ibarat oelat didalam sekam. Bagi orang bear hanya oenggoekannya fang bagoes itoe jang tampak. Segenap peristiwa fang ditemoei didjalan hidoep ini ialah teka teki belaka*".

<sup>19</sup> "*Terpisahnja kabaekan dari kedjahatan tida ada saoejoeng ramboet. Tjoema dengan sedikit gerakan sadja, dari Kabaekan kits gampang langgar Kadjahatan, dan begitoe sabaliknja*".

and thoughts. Instead, fragmentized individuals with little pieces of modern life stories in their hands were arranged with relatively high creativity in a rather loose unity of action.

### Illegitimate child of mixed parentage: the Beginnings of Crime Fiction in Indonesia

The growing importance of monetary intercourse, a steadily advancing infrastructure, fast growing urbanization, and the rapidly increasing poverty caused an enormous rise of social insecurity and crime, not only in all industrialized countries, but also in the Netherlands East Indies. The social structure was badly shaken. In particular, life in the big cities meant alienation and difficulties in orientation in everyday life. For the middle and upper classes, it brought constant fear of being deprived of one's property or even life. The growing popularity of stories about Gentleman-tricksters and the emergence of the detective and police novel are closely linked to this distortion of social structure and, of course, to new methods of crime detection and basic changes in jurisdiction."

Crime literature was no overnight sensation. It *was* based on various roots, and according to their respective cultural backgrounds, the different ethnic groups in Indonesia showed different predispositions to it. Elements of detection had been quite common in Malay and Javanese literary traditions such as the *hikayat*, *babad* and *pandji* texts, as well as in parts of the *wayang*.<sup>21</sup> The Chinese literature had already been displaying its rather long tradition of fiction dealing with crime,<sup>22</sup> when crime fiction started to develop in the Netherlands East Indies. All the different ethnic groups in one way or another reacted literarily to the crime phenomenon and gave first shape to the new genre.

Stories about theft and robbery in Javanese or folktale-like fiction on bandits in Malay probably had had a long tradition already in oral literature when K. F. Winter published a number of Javanese stories in 1849 (Sari Jawa 1991:2230. In 1900, F. D. J. Pangemanann published his version of the popular story of *Si Tjonat*. The Malay text refers explicitly to historical events in 1840, when groups of bandits are said to have terrorized Batavia and its surroundings". The Javanese *Serat isi tjarijos Pandoeng* by Raden Sukardi appeared around 1912 and shows strong humorous and didactic features. It presents the two unlucky -- and rather dumb -- thieves Guna and Cidra (Sari Jawa 1990:1600. The first *sjair* lyrics on

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<sup>20</sup> See for more information on the use of dactylography and circumstantial evidence in the Netherlands East Indies, P. Dekker/ S. H. Tacoma (1938), J.H. Smith (1935), *De Nederlandsch-Indische Politiegids* (1926-29;32), as well as the *Indisch Verslag* in the 1920s and 1930a.

<sup>21</sup> I thank Ibu Sri Widati for having kindly discussed this matter with me and stimulated my further research.

The *gongan* texts established themselves as early as in the *Wanli* periods and can be characterized as a "*story about a crime (often murder) and the eventual conviction of the culprit by a incorruptible judge*" (Idema 1985:271) More information on Chinese crime fiction through the centuries is found in Lu Hann (1959:355-70).

<sup>23</sup> See L.E. van Stenus (1986) for an interpretation of the Malay text. The *Si Tjonat* story was made into a film in 1928 by the Wong brothers in Batavia.

bank robberies and smuggling appeared in the late 19th century?

At the beginning of the 20th century, numerous books conveying stories of romance and crime such as *Souw Gan Tjiang atawa Pemboenoh Jang Samar* (anon. 1904) or *Doewa orang fang sama roepanja* by P.T.H. (Phoa Tjoen Hoay? 1904) were published. Many Chinese titles were translated into Sino-Malay, primarily for the *peranakan* Chinese who could not read Chinese (Salmon 1981). Stories about *silat* (a traditional self-defense art) in particular found an enormous welcome. Both Sino-Malay authors and readers showed high affinity for the newly developing genre of crime fiction. At the end of the first part, after murder and betrayal, the second part of *Tjerita Njonja Lim Pat Nio* by Go Kok Liang is advertised as follows: "*The second book will tell how Khouw Tek Kan passes away after being poisoned by Amina, his wealth and property carried away by Boedin. This story is exceptionally splendid and funny.*"

At the same time, numerous reports and even special columns on criminal acts appeared in the journals. They reported on the theft of seventeen chickens, 4000 m of telephon wire, or a raincoat worth f 27,50 as seriously as they reported on the murder of a young girl or a cold-blooded robbery. These press reports, however, showed great impact on the development of the crime novel and were one of the most important sources of inspiration for many writers.

One of the very productive authors in this field of literature was Tan Boen Kim. *Tjerita dari kawatanan rampok modern, fang telah lakoeken perampokan besar di roemanja toean Tan Boen Thaij, di Grisse, pada 27 April 1917*" (1918) is one of his numerous publications that focuses on (contemporary) crime. Unlike most crime fiction (and particularly the later crime novels), his stories do not omit the process of court trial and conviction. The first of his (at least) two fictionalized versions of the well-reported murder case of the Eurasian prostitute *Nona Fientje de Feniks* describes the exposure of her murderer, an Eurasian official named Brinkman, his trial as well as his suicide after conviction (1916; 1916a; anon. 1917).<sup>27</sup> Tan Boen Kim's version of *Tjerita Si Riboet* may also have been inspired by press reports. On the cover of the edition published in Batavia it says: "*A story that really happened in Soerabaja around mid 1916, when police officer Conraad murdered his mistress, an actrice of the (stambul Constantinopel) theatre. Written and quoted*

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<sup>24</sup> An early *sjair* of that kind dates from 1842. *Sjair Baba Kong Sit* is written in Jawi and deals with the smuggling by the Chinese Kong Sit. He tries to bribe the harbour-master, who in turn starts an investigation. In the end, Kong Sit loses all his goods by confiscation. I thank Kurt Meier for drawing my attention to this *syair*.

<sup>25</sup> "*Boekoe fang ka 2 di tjeritain Khouw Tek Kan meninggal doenia lantaran di kasi makan ratjoen oleh Amina, harta dan miliknja di rampas djoeragan Boedin. - ini tjerita terlebi sangat bagoes dan loetjoe*" (1909:80). Neither the obviously different understanding and moral evaluation of crime nor its presentation can be discussed here, but will certainly be given thorough consideration in the present research.

<sup>26</sup> "*The story of a modern gang of robbers that committed a big robbery in the house of Tan Boen Thaij in Grisse on 27 April 1917*".

<sup>27</sup> Peter van Zonneveld minutely compiled and recently published all available historical facts connected with the murder case *Nona Fientje de Feniks* (1992).

from here and there by Tan Boen Kim" (1917).

A key role in the development of crime fiction, however, was played by the so-called *Nyai* stories. They might be considered the actual predecessors of the crime novel in the Netherlands East Indies. These stories about indigenous mistresses of Chinese or Dutchmen were highly popular since the turn of the century and bear many crime elements, including murder. These crime elements spring from the conflict-burdened inter-racial relationships which at the same time crossed the boundaries of social classes and on top of it perpetuated the inequality of gender. The triple conflict was often -- and by no means only fictitiously -- solved by violence.<sup>29</sup>

## The genre blossoms

Indigenous crime fiction developed (and adapted) patterns and structures that encapsulated the so far unmasked reference to social life into rather fixed schemes. The conflict situation was abstracted from its realistic background to be embedded in the western influenced formulas of crime fiction and entertaining literature.

The first translations of western crime literature were published by Eurasians and *peranakan* Chinese shortly after the appearance of the original versions in Europe. Mainly Sherlock Holmes stories were translated, but not exclusively. Also the French *mass murderer* Landru (and his more than 200 victims) found translator, publisher and audience in Indonesia. Arthur Griffith, Maurice Leblanc, William Tufnell Le Queux, Baroness Orczy, Sax Rohmer, Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, Ponson Du Terrail, they all met the taste of the indigenous readership (Salmon 1981:525-34). By way of translation into (Sino-)Malay, Lord Lister and William Strong, *Fantomas*, hard-boiled detective Nick Carter, and Gentleman-trickster Arsene Lupin were introduced to the Indonesian readership during the first decades of this century, some even earlier. French, German, and Dutch police novels appeared on the market in Malay translations and some were also serialized (*Tjerita Pilihan: Tjerita politie resia di ...* 1924).

Sino-Malay authors and publishers were the first to imitate the genre and to create 'indigenous detective novels' of all kinds. The novel-journals *Penghidoepan* and *Tjerita Roman* -- to mention only two -- were full of stories like *Pendjahat clan penoeloeng* (Fermantsah 1921), *Nona Siok Lie*, *Siapa itoe pernboenoe* (Tio Ie Soei 1922), *Satoe pemboenoeanjang kedjem* (Chen 1928), *Zalf adjaib atawa siapa itoe pemboenoe* (Wun 1928), or *Tiga millioen satenga* (1925) by Tan Boen Kim. One popular topic of the early texts was organized crime as committed by criminal gangs that operated in big cities like Batavia or Surabaya. *Perkoempoelan sarang-nja lawa-lawo: tjerita fang kedjadian di Betawi* by H.T.B. (Tan Keng Sam) or

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<sup>28</sup> "Soeatoe tjerita fang betoel terdjadi di Soerabaja koetika di pertengahan taon 1916, jaitoe politie opziener Conraad boenoe actrice Constantinopel fang mendjadi katjinta'annja. Terkarang dan terpetik dari sana-sini oleh Tan Boen Kim"

<sup>29</sup> See for more information on *Nyai* stories: Termorshuizen (1981); Bocquet-Siek (1984); Maier (1990). Pramoedya Ananta Toer republished a selection of *Nyai* stories in his collection *Tempo Doeloe* (1982). The *Nyai Dasima* story actually inspired the earliest indigenous film production in the 1920s.

*Boeaja Soerabaja* by Njoo Cheong Seng, both published in 1926, can be mentioned as examples.

The Sino-Malay texts, however, more or less restrict themselves to an intra-ethnic setting. Some plots are situated in China. They are well-composed, but unlike the western pattern or the later Sumatran novels, they show little movement or narrative speed. Action scenes usually centre on short *silat* fights. In the course of time, most elements of mysticism still dominant in *Nyai* stories (such as *guna-guna*) or in *silat* stories had been substituted by 'explained supernatural'. The serial *Gagaklodra* created by Njoo Cheong Seng in the early 1930s most wittily combines mystic and *silat* elements with western narrative style. It playfully questions different understandings of reality.

Closer examination reveals that some of the traditional *silat* stories, a genre of its own, actually took in western crime elements to an extent that significant features of the one genre conflicted with those of the other. Provided that such 'genre markers' in fact function as devices for guiding the reader's reception of the text, such a mingling of significant features could either lead to confusion or stimulate a new mode of reading. One text, for example, starts off as a very traditional *silat* story (Sim Tji Hok 1933): in a remote place somewhere, a wise old man teaches a young person (here his daughter) the philosophy of life, and of *silat*; then the teacher is killed by bandits, the young woman leaves the hermitage to avenge his death; now a change of scene: a hotel room in a big city, a gathering of criminals. Though the style and the protagonists of the text remain unchanged, from this point on, the text demands a different mode of reading and cognitive acquisition. This kind of 'modernization process' of a genre and its forms of reception definitely deserves separate research.<sup>3</sup>

From the mid-1930s on, the Sino-Malay crime novels had to compete with the *madjalah roman* coming from Padang and Medan. The latter had by then turned into the centre of popular literature. The journals and books published there spread all over the Indonesian archipelago. Authors like Si Oema, Taher Samad or Surapati had their regular appearances in connection with detective stories, and A. Damhoeri created his Eurasian detective *Sir John*. Names like Matu Mona and Yoesoef Sou'yb were no longer only famous for their commitment to the nationalist movement, but also as writers of best-selling (or better, 'best-lending') crime novels. (Interestingly enough, both author and hero started their careers not in Medan, but with the Sino-Malay journal *Liberty* in Malang.) When Sou'yb's hero *Elang Emas* in the third of his approximately eight adventures committed a murder, even the newspapers reported on it. It is worth noting that this serial hero explicitly personifies the 'bad'. Yet he is brought forward as the positive figure to identify oneself with. An equally positive character is introduced as the opponent of *Elang Emas*: Sir John from Singapore, presumably an Eurasian, attached to the state police -- and an openly 'borrowed' figure from Damhoeri's crime novels. None of the two ever succeeds in completely defeating the opponent.

It can safely be assumed that all authors were strongly influenced by trans-

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I would like to thank Ignatius Supriyanto, who kindly supported me with his enormous knowledge on postwar *silat* stories. He pointed out to me the sociocritical character of the genre, which makes a comparison with the crime novel even more desirable.

lations of western crime novels (that they often produced themselves). Still, their texts gained a quality of its own. All protagonists of Malay stories are amazingly mobile, action-orientated -- and apparently favour the English (!) language and dress. They, as if given by nature, travel throughout the archipelago and even to far away countries -- including British colonies. Only Europe is hardly ever mentioned. All the more surprisingly so, that the plot of at least three novels is tightly connected with Germany. *Pemboenoe Dr. Wolf Glauser* by Si Oema (1939) deals in a critical manner with the persecution of Jews in Germany. On the other hand, in S. Djarens' novel *Kegelisahan Dr. Zin* (1939) a German Jew takes the role of the villain who had to leave Germany because he had stolen a medical formula. He is finally convicted of having experimented on his patients, but then he even commits murder. In the first of his two novels about Dr. Chung, Dr. Wu and the private detective Bacht(iar), S. Oesmany allows his protagonist to visit Leipzig to enhance his medical knowledge by working with a German Jew expert and a Russian expert (1940).

Most settings are, however, situated in the Asian world, mainly in Indonesia itself or in Singapore, but they are not restricted to the Malay society. Chinese or *peranakan*, Arabs, Eurasians as well as Europeans take part in the action. Sometimes the confrontation between colonizers and the colonized is portrayed, usually with a trace of irony. In some texts the conflict is more subtly touched, the political undertones, however, are not negligible. The *Patjar Merah* texts by Matu Mona and Yusdja -- though not typical of this genre and actually revolving around the nationalist Tan Malakka -- are of rather outspoken character (see also Poeze 1976).

In contrast to the cosmopolitan flavour of the Malay crime fiction, most of the crime novels written by Eurasians seldom leave their own, westernized cultural context. Their stories unconsciously manifest their desire to be part of the world of the Dutch, with whom they ranked legally, but not in terms of social status. Meanwhile, the very few novels written by Dutch authors in Dutch merely used the Indonesian locale as a picturesque backdrop, but otherwise kept the actual storyline within the boundaries of the European community in the colony.

Two Malay serials deserve separate mention: *Patjar Koenig* and *Purna Malavaji alias Jim Carly, Pentjoeri Ksatria*. Both serials were published in the late 1930s. The six stories still preserved of the latter do not mention the author. The serial was published twice a month by De Indische Roman Bibliotheek in Batavia. Its hero, however, is, just like Elang Emas, a modern Robin Hood. He takes from the rich to give to the poor (repeatedly stressed in the texts) and he punishes the bad -- mainly in Calcutta, but also in other parts of Asia, if needed. Whereas the reader never learns about the social background or origin of Elang Emas, the life story of Malavaji, an Indian prince by birth, is given in the first part of the serial and sounds very much like a Javanese legend or a Malay *hikayat*.

*PatjarKoenig*, writteh by Ketjindoean and published by the private Dutch publisher Kolff/Buning, polarizes good and evil just as the popular western pattern does. All books feature the Javanese (!) private detective Raden Soebroto and the notorious criminal Patjar Keening. The latter is supported by his *gang*, though it is strongly stressed that its numerous members are actually victims of Patjar Keening themselves who cleverly manipulates and instrumentalizes people. As in the *Elang Emas* serial, none of the two protagonists ever succeeds in defeating the opponent, but there is no question what side the reader is supposed to take:

Patjar Koening is the personification of pure evil.

The basic structure of the plot as well as the composition of protagonists are very much reminiscent of European crime novels. The eight parts of this serial do impress with a brilliant composition of 'fragmentized individuals'. While the protagonists seemingly keep hiding life stories from the reader, the detective's main task is to create and pin stories to them. Despite all its 'westernness', the narrative style alludes that the author is likely to be Malay, certainly not Dutch and probably not Eurasian either.

Both serials described above are of special interest because the fractions and contradictions with regard to form and content, style and story, illustrate the frictions and contradictions within colonial society.

## **The colonial power writes back**

The immense success of the indigenous crime fiction caused the colonial institution Balai Poestaka to react. *Wawatjan Rampog di Tjimahi Tahoen 1900* by Radjadi was first published around 1910. Its form complies perfectly with the rules of the traditional Sundanese *tembang*, but its content is not traditional at all: it describes the misdeeds of a gang of bandits from Bogor, that is chased by whole villages, and eventually arrested and sentenced in Tjimahi, Bandung. This poem promotes the notion that 'crime does not pay' and can be read as 'counterlyrics produced by Balai Poestaka to counteract the first indigenous forms of reflection on crime al

Privately published popular Javanese novels -- most of them translations of western adventure stories -- had been on the market for at least two decades (Quinn 1992:20), when Balai Poestaka decided to broaden its range of Javanese publications. In addition to traditional, 'classical' texts, Balai Poestaka now also published Javanese novels of crime fiction character. Considering the fact that the novel itself was not yet a common phenomenon in Javanese culture, this kind of novel certainly was a novelty. In contrast to the Sino-Malay crime fiction at that time, titles such as *Sukatja* (Soeratman Sastradiardja 1923), *Katju Sandi* (Sowignja 1938), *Ngulandra* (Djajaatmadja 1936) and *Jarot* (Jasawidagda 1922;1931) did not consequently follow the patterns of crime novels. Only after independence, were they actually categorized as crime fiction.' The aspects of crime, however, were strongly functionalized as supportive means to strengthen colonial ideology. A speaking example is *Jarot*. In a loyal colonial spirit, the young man fights the smuggling of opium and in the end is appointed a government official.

In August 1923, *Nick Carter* received negative mention, when it was stated

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<sup>31</sup> I thank Tom van den Berge who patiently helped me to understand this Sundanese *tembang*.

After many years of existing in bookform in the colony, *Buffalo Bill* suddenly received the label of 'detective story' (Resultaten 1926:45). Interestingly, too, the Sundanese novel *Diarah pati* by Margasoeleksana was introduced by Balai Poestaka as a "native detective novel" (Resultaten 1930:28). Contradicting Balai Poestaka's strong attitude against any kind of sensation, the cover displays a bloody knife. It seems that the indigenous literary production once again extracted a compromise from the colonial institution.



that the indigenous readership obviously still fell *forprikkel- en sensatie-literatuur*. It was shortly afterwards, when the first Balai Poestaka translations of Agatha Christie and Conan Doyle novels were put into circulation.

In 1928, *Orang dari Perantjis* by Ivans was published in Malay translation, one of the very few examples of contemporary western popular literature to be selected by Balai Poestaka. Two other examples are Edgar Wallace (*Bandit Bangsawan*) and G. K Chesterton (*Mata berdjoebah*), neither of whom made it to the bookshelves, but appeared only once in serialized form in the weekly *Pandji Poestaka*. Agatha Christie was a little more persistent. Apart from one translation circulated as a serial in *Pandji Poestaka* (*Perkoempoelan Rahsia*), another Malay translation (and a Javanese adaptation of the same novel) was distributed in book form by Balai Poestake. Relatively successful was Sherlock Holmes, who in 1926 filled the *Pandji Poestaka* serial section with three of his cases. About three years later, they were even republished in book form. Still, Balai Poestaka never produced any Javanese versions of Sherlock Holmes.

Surprisingly, the Malay translations of Sherlock Holmes stories by Balai Poestaka were much less successful than all the privately published ones. The neatly recorded library lending statistics indicate that none of the Balai Poestaka translations ever achieved any lending records. On the other hand, the early Sino-Malay translations of Conan Doyle were very popular indeed, and over the years spread the Sherlock Holmes legend throughout Indonesia. Many authors were obviously inspired by these stories, as numerous references in articles, advertisements, prefaces and novels illustrate. Damhoeri paid his tribute to Sherlock Holmes by dedicating a whole chapter to him. With regard to Conan Doyle, he lets his hero say: "As a matter of fact, the progress of our people with regard to literature is still far behind. (...) Take the detective story, for instance, where are our authors who know how to produce them?" Many authors certainly tried.

Compared with the original Sherlock Holmes versions, it shows that the privately published translations endured hardly any alteration, and the Balai Poestaka versions none at all. Thus, the difference in popularity is hardly to be explained by manipulations of the texts. It seems plausible that the selection of the stories might account for the grade of popularity. In the four stories chosen for translation by Balai Poestaka, no serious or even no crime at all is committed. Moreover, Sherlock Holmes appears as a 'clean hero with no shortcomings whatsoever, no drug addiction, no failure, no defeat. The story *A Scandal in Bohemia*, where Holmes is defeated by a woman, or *The Five Orange Pips*, where Holmes cannot prevent his client, a young and innocent man, from being murdered, are only found in privately published Sino-Malay translations.

Despite the little success Balai Poestaka had with the western classical detective stories, a rather optimistic evaluation of the literary situation was made in February 1926: owing to the activities of Balai Poestaka, the reading public now seemed to turn to 'less harmful' books than the still widely distributed

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<sup>33</sup> Moengsoeh moengging tjanglakan (1929) and Moesoeh dalam selimoet (1929). The title of the original novel is *The secret adversary* (1922).

<sup>34</sup> "memang kemadjoean bangsa kita dalam literatuur masih djaoeh tertjeVemja dibelakang. (...) Semisal tjeritera detectief ini, mana orang kita pandai memboeatnja" (1938:21).

indigenous detective novels.' Moreover, by the mid-1930s, Balai Poestaka itself had succeeded in launching 'original' Malay crime novels. The popular author Stunan HS had been won over to write several crime novels for Balai Pustaka (which are among the very few to survive colonial times). Titles like *Menangkap Toekang Tjopet* (Pamenan 1934), *Sapoe TanganFantasie* (Nazir 1937) and *Tjintjin setempel* (Ardi Soma 1939) followed. They are forgotten now. With a setting and protagonists that are all-Indonesian, these texts still followed the pattern of the classical western detective novel. They were the colonial response to the Sino-Malay *madjalah roman* of the 1920s.

In 1939, all optimism was scattered. Balai Poestaka openly reprimanded the literary scene of Medan for its 'naughty behaviour'. With a two-part article titled *Oedara Baroe di Medan*<sup>37</sup>, the literary scene in Medan in particular with regard to its production of detective novels came under attack. *"But we are disappointed. Most of those books are detective stories. That fact should not yet cause deep disappointment, because there are a number of good detective stories in the world of literature. But the detective stories published in Medan are far from being of such a quality."*<sup>37</sup> The trivialization of the Medan journals and the humiliation of their producers was certainly one of Balai Poestaka's strategies. The journals' titles were ridiculed, and the publishers' ability to evaluate literature was openly doubted: *"If such a detective story is considered to be a piece of literature that will advance the people, alas!"*<sup>38</sup> The fact that 'promising' authors had deserted to 'the enemy', the Medan '*roman madjalah*', was noted with disappointment and concern. Although Balai Poestaka also expressed its satisfaction with regard to some of the results of the Medan conference, the struggle was obviously still far from being settled.

## Excursion into the film medium'

Western movies were imported and shown in the Netherlands East Indies as early as the first decade of this century. Shanghai and other non-western productions followed immediately. The first indigenous movie was produced around 1924. Censorship set in early, but never reached the severity and efficiency which the printed word had to cope with (Van der Berg 1991).

The cinematic culture blossomed in all the big cities. Mobile cinemas

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Document from the Algemeen Rijksarchief, Den Haag: Openbare Verbaal 2818, Nr 45.26 February 1926.

<sup>38</sup> Pandji Poestaka: XVII (30.12.1939) 104 and XVIII (6.1.1940) 1/2; p.1823f;p.6f.

<sup>37</sup> "Tetapi kita merasa ketjewa. Boekoe-boekoe itoe kebanjaka.nnja boekoe tjeritera detectief Hal jang begitoe beloem boleh menerbitkan ketjewa fang sangat, karena banjak djoega boekoe tjeritera detectief fang baik-baik dalam lapangan kesoesteraan doenia. Tetapi boekoe-boekoe detectief fang diterbitkan di Medan itoe djaoeh dari pada itoe" (Pandji Poestaka 1940:1824).

<sup>38</sup> "Kalau tjeritera detectieffang demikian dipandang sebagai boeah kesoesteraan jang akan memadjoekan bangsa, amboi!" (Pandji Poestaka 1940:1824).

<sup>39</sup> A catalogue-type survey over Indonesian film productions including biographical data has been compiled and published by *Archipel* (1973). Statistical data, if not noted otherwise, were taken from the *Indisch Verslag* (1930-39). For further information on the Indonesian film production, see Haris Jauhari (1992).

brought the latest American and European films to even the smallest village (Van der Berg 1991:91). Film theatres began to appear, and intense competition stimulated large-scale advertisement. Costly brochures were launched, most of them with pictures taken from the promoted film. Almost all journals and papers spread the latest news of the world of movies and its stars, from both East and West.

The audience consisted not only of Europeans, Eurasians, and Chinese, but the *pribumi* as well could usually afford the entrance fee (at least for the 2nd or 3rd class seats). Yoesoef Sou'yb used to go to the pictures, too. He admitted that he always felt inspired by the films he saw, so that he usually went home immediately to write another novel.<sup>40</sup> The author Njoo Cheong Seng also had a special relation with the medium of film. He was a famous scriptwriter (and married to the then most popular actress Fifi Young).

Many of the crime novels, especially those published from the late thirties on, seem to adopt cinematic narrative devices (eg. elements of motion or cuts). The stories were often told as if they were seen through the eye of a camera. The *Bioscoop-Romans*, published by Kolff-Buning about the same time, go even a step further. Each of these books, approximately seventeen in number and some of them crime fiction, owed its existence solely to the respective indigenous film of the same title. The film had already been shown (and presumably with success), before the book version was even put on paper. The film story was transformed into a novel, illustrated with pictures taken from the actual film. Abstractly speaking, reading such a 'film book' individualizes the collectively experienced reception of a film story, but allows the reader (provided he or she has seen the film) to re-collectivize the 'lonesome reading by recalling the collective film event. It also means, however, that the reader's imagination is substantially trimmed.

Interestingly enough, none of the indigenous (or other) crime novels of the 1920s and 1930s have -- to my knowledge -- ever been made into movies. A lack of interest in the genre is not a plausible explanation. The first non-western films in Indonesia actually chose *Nyai* stories and early Sino-Malay crime fiction such as *Si Tjonat*, *Rampok Prianger* and *Resia Borobudur* as their subjects (Salim Said 1991:18ff). Whereas the genre as printed matter quickly developed further, the crime genre ceased off in the world of film. In 1926, the Dutch colonials prescribed by regulation that besides "*women in scanty bathing costumes or underwear*", no burglary, murder, poisoning, hanging and other ways of killing may be displayed in movies (Van den Berg 1991:105). Still, it seems a mystery that Dutch censorship should have been more successful in controlling the film media than it actually was with any printed matter. As a matter of fact, the crime film as a genre has not found any market in Indonesia to date.

## Summary

In the course of modernization, radical social and economic changes took place in Indonesia within a few decades. Correspondingly, paradigms underwent just as radical a change. This fundamental process is vividly illustrated by the

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<sup>40</sup> I thank Yoesoef Sou'yb for this biographical information (interviews, November 1992).

text (and film) production at the time. With the example of the particular genre of the crime, the adventure and the educational novel, not only can the fusion of literary and social processes in the context of ideology be revealed, but general consensualizing processes also be traced.

Indonesian crime fiction, for instance, marks the emergence and development of perceptions of a genre. It is to be asked in which way these perceptions reflect or even shape, guide, stimulate or simulate the proceedings of cognition. In order to unfold the capabilities of literary genres to reflect cultural change, present paradigms have to be questioned just the same. General assumptions of 'knowledge', acquirement of 'information, forms of discourse and perception, and mechanisms of consensualization need to be discussed and traced back in the texts examined." Any process of communication and 'cognitive orientation gains an additional dimension when part of an intercultural encounter. The ways of experiencing and possibly acknowledging the cultural Other, the process of creating a 'Self and a cultural identity, requires careful consideration. The Indonesian crime novel shows that the indigenous authors involved suffered from the 'cross-eyed look': "with one eye staring at the vision of a self-created cultural identity, while the other keeps squinting at the western cultural patterns, keen to imitate them. Consequently, the occurring fractures and open contradictions as well as new combinations of value patterns within the world model conveyed by the text give insight into the process of cultural change.

The by now accessible material reflects the restructuring processes and new structures within the respective 'cultural frames'. Aspects such as individuality and identity, modernization, urbanization, communication and mass media are topics, as well as perceptions of good and evil, social criticisms, concepts of heroism, or ideas of fictionality and improbability. Narrative forms express uncertainty with regard to chronology of events and their relation to the 'real world'.

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<sup>41</sup> With regard to the predominant understanding of science and its history, which still subtly fancies the idea of an indivisible and objective truth, a case study of this kind is of immediate interest to the present-day western scholarship in general.

<sup>42</sup> This metaphor originally goes back to Heinrich Heine's remark on writing women who force themselves to keep one eye on the paper, while the other one keeps checking with the male world they still want to please. That awkward situation makes them squint. Weigel (1983) has turned this idea into a theoretical approach to women's writing and women's identity in general. This approach is to a certain extent applicable to the colonial situation in the Netherlands East Indies.

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