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Balai Pustaka and the Politics of Knowledge

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Abstract

During the colonial period of Indonesia the Dutch government was an important source of knowledge which was disseminated through the production of books, such as textbooks and other printed material. In response to the establishment of many new commercial printers and publishers, the colonial government, in 1917, set up its own publishing company, Balai Pustaka, which also published attractive and popular books. This new publishing house intentionally and unintentionally served several goals at a time that was characterized by the rise of young Indonesian intellectuals who were part of new political movements formed in the first decades of the 20th century.

Keywords: Balai Pustaka; colonial history; Dutch East Indies; history of publishing and printing

Abstrak

Selama periode kolonial Indonesia, pemerintah Belanda menjadi sumber utama pengetahuan yang disebarkan lewat pencetakan buku-buku, termasuk buku teks dan materi publikasi lainnya. Menyambut pendirian beragam perusahaan penerbit dan percetakan baru, pemerintah kolonial mendirikan perusahaan percetakan sendiri pada tahun 1917 bernama Balai Pustaka yang juga menerbitkan buku-buku populer yang menarik. Perusahaan cetak baru ini juga secara sadar ataupun tidak sadar memiliki fungsi lain pada waktu itu yang diwarnai oleh naiknya kaum intelektual muda Indonesia baru yang bergabung dalam gerakan politik baru pada dekade-dekade awal abad ke-20.

Kata kunci: Balai Pustaka; Hindia Belanda; sejarah kolonial; sejarah publikasi dan percetakan

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A Government Printing House

While oral forms of transferring knowledge were also important in the colonial period, paper-based forms arguably had and still have some distinct advantages over oral forms for the disseminating of information. The study of publishers and printers then is a very useful source to reveal the history of knowledge transmission. They make knowledge accessible through books, and with the help of bookstores or other intermediaries, they also distribute this knowledge. This article seeks to answer the question of who were responsible for this printed material in Indonesia's colonial past. A book historical approach offer a useful way of answering this question.

For many years, printing in the colonial period of Indonesia was in the hands of the colonial state, and some missionaries. In 1809 a new era began with the start of the *Landsdrukkerij.* This printing office was a consolidation of printing presses in the colony previously regulated by the colonial government and the Dutch East India Company. The printed matter of the *Landsdrukkerij* consisted of among others, ordinances, catalogues, advertisements and glossaries. The printing office stayed in service until Indonesia's independence. In addition to the *Landsdrukkerij*, owned by the colonial government, several private, commercial companies in due time became active in the book industry, such as book dealers, printers and publishers, and binderies as well. Over three hundred businesses were operating between 1816 and 1920. By 1900, the colonial society witnessed the operation of a large number of publishers, in almost every city on every island in the archipelago (Kuitert, 2020: 320-330). Nevertheless, a new governmental publishing house was established hundred years later in addition to the *Landsdrukkerij*. It was originally called the *Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur* (Office for Public Reading Matter) and, in 1917, it became a the publishing company with the name 'Balai Pustaka', which means hall, house or bureau of books. The colonial government's aim was to have its own printing capability which would operate alongside the existing commercial ones.

Balai Pustaka was not an ordinary publishing company given that it was an organisation with a wider range of activities than just publishing. Its publications of books and other printed matter were organized in eight sections: Editorial, Translation, Press Bureau, Printing Shop, Book Trade, Book Shop, Subscriptions, and the People's Reading Room. An icon of the company was the 'Balai Pustaka bus' which distributed books in the rural areas of the Dutch East Indies. There was also a Balai Pustaka book kiosk which made books available among the local population in rural areas. These outlets summon up idyllic images with good intentions. According to its own propaganda, the Balai Pustaka aimed to teach the native inhabitants to learn to read, to disperse books and to advance culture. However, the establishment of the new publishing company was not one of altruism alone; there were also

politics involved. While archival material of Balai Pustaka has not survived, a number of publisher's lists, as well as printed annual reports, and a good deal of material by and about the administrators still exist. Doris Jedamski in her research work on the Balai Pustaka, mainly focusses on the literary and linguistic side of its business (Jedamski, 1995, 1997; Fitzpatrick, 2000) while Yamamoto focusses on its press summaries and press control (Yamamoto, 2019).

The Balai Pustaka, through its publications, contributed to the literary socialisation of (a part of) the population of the Dutch East Indies. The colonial government also used Balai Pustaka as an instrument of linguistic politics in the colony and as a tool to control and censor publications. While this subjects are both very relevant aspects of the history of Balai Pustaka, this paper focuses on the ideological aspects of this publishers' policy, especially as far as books are concerned. At the time Balai Pustaka was established, the colony was a conjunction of religions within what became more and more a political battlefield. In this climate 'a book' was not a neutral object. What was the Balai Pustaka's position with respect to this specific functioning of books?

Since 1816, the archipelago was once again in Dutch hands, having been occupied by the British for a brief period. Societies of missionaries from the predominantly Protestant Netherlands were actively engaged in converting the colony to Christianity, with varying degrees of success (Van der Molen & Arps, 1999). Officially, conversion to Christianity was not considered a task by the colonial government, and proselytizing was not allowed. But the government supported the process nevertheless with taxes, subsidies, and a benevolent attitude. In the interior, the so-called nature-religions (animism) had many followers, while Islam had firm roots in coastal areas, because trade had been carried out there for centuries, including international trade with Arabs (Steenbrink 1991). Some areas were predominately Islamic. In 1913, in the colony there were approximately 37 million inhabitants, of which 30 million were Muslims. In the second half of the nineteenth century there was considerable unrest in the colony, especially after 1870, resulting from Dutch imperialism seeking to control greater areas of the archipelago which employed considerable violence. The struggle however, was to gain territory while religion was a secondary matter. On Java, Muslims and Christians were able to live in relative harmony with each other. Muslims, for example, did not live strictly according to the Koran, as witnessed by colonial observers, such as K.F. Holle and P.J. Veth (Vrolijk 2013: 100, Kruithof 2014: 224). A survey of the Batak region records the opinion of conservative and old fashioned Dutchmen: 'No one [in the Batak region] knows now what the Koran says. No one, with the possible exception of a few pilgrims who went to Mecca for the Hadji, know Arabic.'[1]The survey states that for many inhabitants of

1) *De Islam in de Bataklanden. Vragenlijst met gedeeltelijke beantwoording*. Uitgaven van

the region Islam was a family tradition, coupled with mysticism and was not associated with political struggle. Rather than religious conflict, what did generate rebelliousness was the suffering of indigenous inhabitants under the 'Cultivation System' (the system of forced farming). The colonial government rejected efforts of any forced conversion to Christianity; the government even prohibited missionaries from operating in certain districts (Noer, 1973: 166). This was the case for example, in Aceh, which was predominantly Islamic and where the colonial army was conducting a colonial war (Aceh War, 1870-1904). Nevertheless, in the colonial annual reports, religion was a consistent element and was depicted as if a football championship, where the strengths and weaknesses of the various spheres of influence were measured, province by province: 'Among the heathen population groups, the Mohammedan religion is constantly gaining supporters,' as reported in an 1886 report about Benkoolen.[2] In 1910, there were 19 000 Christians of indigenous background, and that number was slowly increasing. In 1923, a census was made of the number of Muslims who had converted, finding that from a population of 35 million, only 28 000 had converted to Christianity. Dutch Prime Minister Abraham Kuyper's responded to this census data with 'Almost everywhere, it is like ploughing on rocks'.[3]

Balai Pustaka's Method of Operation and Its Staff

By the end of the nineteenth century, the colonial administration began to follow a different course, which inaugurated the period of the so-called 'Ethical politics.' This entailed the Dutch government redefining its goal to promote a flourishing colony, that would benefit the indigenous people, instead of the long practice of robbing it of its resources. The famous expert on Islam, Ch. Snouck Hurgronje, remarked in relation to this: 'we have to have a spiritual annexation to follow the material one.' To that end, education became a principal focus. It was in this 'constructive' climate that the first steps were taken toward the foundation of what would become the Balai Pustaka. The *Commissie voor de Inlandsche School- en Volkslectuur* (Committee for Reading Matter for Indigenous People), established in 1908, suggested making available good reading matter for the local population, especially for education purposes. The intention was to publish material in the local language. For the actual technical printing of new books, the Committee made use of the *Landsdrukkerij*, the Committee itself served as

het Bataksch Instituut nr/ 2, 1908. ('Questionnaire')

2) *Koloniaal verslag* 1901, p. 35. In these annual reports, the numbers of Catholics and Protestants were recorded, but not the number of Muslims, possibly because the number was sustainably high. Those converted in 1923 were baptized, and counted.

3) Abraham Kuyper, cited from the *Handelingen Eerste Kamer* 1913, p. 137 , 17 february. (Archives of Dutch Upper House, see https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/historisch).

an intermediary. In the beginning, in 1908, the Committee comprised only one person, at that time, G.A.J. Hazeu. He lived in Batavia working as a professor in Javanese language and a government advisor 'for Native and Arab Affairs'. In 1910, D.A. Rinkes became chairman of the Committee. In 1917 the Committee formed a new institute: *Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur en aanverwante aangelegenheden* (Office for Public Reading Matter and related matters) with Rinkes as its chairman. The books were now published with the Balai Pustaka imprint. From that moment on Balai Pustaka became a publishing house with Rinkes as its director.

D.A. Rinkes (1878–1954) had been a student of Ch. Snouck Hurgronje, and had received his doctorate in 1909 for a study of Javanese and Sumatran mysticism.[4] Given his knowledge of indigenous languages and cultures, he was put to work not only as a publisher but also as a 'government advisor', a political function that had previously been carried out by Snouck Hurgronje and later by Hazeu. The advisor informed the colonial government about indigenous laws and traditions. Rinkes realised that the maintenance of some sort of unity in the colony depended not so much on the local aristocracy (the administrators) forming a bridgehead, as had so long been the case, but on young intellectuals. He wanted to direct his activities at that group. In 1911, he distributed a circular among the more educated part of the Indonesian population to persuade them of the importance of good public reading matter: 'it is incontrovertibly the task of the more highly developed natives to continue to lead the way for their countrymen and to provide them with the means of finding and maintaining their path to progress.' (*Landsdrukkerij* 1912). Rinkes was an enlightened spirit who strived not to be patronising, but rather to nourish as much as possible a reading culture among the Indonesian population – where oral traditions had deep roots. In that respect, he was working against the spirit of the conservative Dutchmen in the colony who saw advantage in holding the native population back. He was often attacked by the conservative press, which ridiculed him, and was invariably identified as a naïve fool who was in league with the natives.

With the establishment of Balai Pustaka, Rinkes introduced, among other things, editors who had a command of the local languages. The three Javanese, Sundanese and Madurese editors working for Balai Pustaka also had an indigenous background and, to judge by their names, two of the other seven colleagues (ten in total) were also part of the Indonesian population. In the annual report they identified as administrative assistants. The annual reports also record next to the title of each book the name of the translator,

4) Title: *Abdoerraoef van Singkel. Bijdrage tot de kennis van de mystiek op Sumatra en Java*, Leiden 1909. His descendants have made a good deal of information available about him on the internet: http://www.rinkes.nl/genealogie/douwe-adolf-rinkes/

Figure 1. Portrait of the Javanese editors and other staff members of the Balai Pustaka. Their names as well as the year the picture was taken are unknown. Collection Stichting Nationaal Museum van Wereldculturen.

which are mostly Indonesian names (see Figure 1).[5] These administrative assistants earned between 360 and 480 Dutch guilders per year while the editors-in-chief were paid four times as much.[6] Most 'natives' who worked for Balai Pustaka had learned the official variety of Malay in school, some of whom had been educators (Jedamski 1997: 163) Some of the translators subsequently developed into literary authors, such as Nur Sutan Iskandar. The publishing house grew quickly. In 1919, there were already seventy-five employees, and according to by 1926, according to the annual report of that year, the Balai Pustaka employed 250 people.[7] By then, the Balai Pustaka had become larger than the *Landsdrukkerij* had ever been.

The books were originally sold via the *Depot van Leermiddelen* (Textbook Depository), a governmental wholesale outlet where schools normally placed their orders. From 1919 the publishing house sold its own books. The books were distributed by means of sales agents, known as sub-depository holders, or by the Office itself. On the basis of a record of names, the sales agents appear to have been indigenous and, in some cases, ran a printing company on the side, or some other business, because with their work as depository holders they earned only 10 guilders per annum.[8] It happened that a Chinese bookseller bought up supplies in order to sell them for a higher price, but to prevent that from happening again the price was printed on the cover. The

5) *Resultaten* (Results) of *Volkslectuur* for the year 1926. These annual results are archived at the KITLV Library (Leiden).

6) *Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1915-1916, kamerstuknummer 4 ondernummer 17 "Begrooting van Nederlandsch-Indië voor het dienstjaar 1916".* (Archive of Dutch Parliament, see https://zoek.officielebekendmakingen.nl/uitgebreidzoeken/historisch)

7) Results of the *Volkslectuur* for the year 1926, KITLV. The agents are probably included in the count.

8) *Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1915-1916, kamerstuknummer 4 ondernummer 17. Begrooting van Nederlandsch-Indië voor het dienstjaar 1916.* (Archives of Dutch Parliament)

sales agents did, on the other hand, receive a commission for every book sold. Balai Pustaka asked its agents also to report on what was going on in Indonesian circles. In 1925, their were fifty-eight agents.

Rinkes decided to put a great deal of energy into promotional activities, such as offering books through market stalls and by advertising (Jedamski 1992: 23-46). The Balai Pustaka buses, mentioned above, with their mobile display stalls, are also relevant in this regard. In the period 1920-1921, the publishing house acquired its own printing-press and so they were able to do their own printing as well. Balai Pustaka publications cost between 50 and 75 cents for a novel. By way of comparison: in advertisements for books in Dutch language newspapers, a novel cost anywhere between 1 to 5 guilders (100 cents -500 cents). The Balai Pustaka, with its low prices and omnipresence, was able to become a strong competitor to the other publishing houses and in contrast did not have to make a profit, nor did it. For every guilder that the company earned, they had spent, in the beginning, seven guilders and later three.[9] A serious market for books was emerging in the colony, partly under the influence of the Balai Pustaka's policies. This influence is shown not only in the opinions of other book companies, but also in the comprehensive bibliography of published books in the Dutch East Indies by G. Ockeloen (Kuitert 2020, Ockeloen 1939). Other Dutch-owned publishing houses also began to publish books in the local languages, as is clear, for example, from the catalogue in Malay, from the Van Dorp publishing house under the title *Daftar Boekoe Boekoe* (c.1920).

Although Balai Pustaka's books were quite inexpensive, yet they were still too expensive for many Indonesians. Giving it away for free was not an option since Rinkes had realised that free pamphlets were sometimes used as shelf paper (Maters 1998: 71). With the colony's vast area, distribution was a problem, and book shops were much too scarce. Rinkes decided, consequently, to set up libraries in schools and other institutions. With the support of the Indonesian administrators managing the stock, and money Balai Pustaka received from the Dutch government books were made available for this purpose. These 'libraries' were in fact only a few bookcases containing books, not a room or building filled with books. Adults as well as school children could borrow these books. In the colonial society libraries consisted of Dutch libraries and 'Indigenous' libraries. The latter category comprised almost exclusively publications by the Office for Public Reading Matter (later becoming Balai Pustaka). The Dutch libraries included books which were regarded suitable for only a limited audience and which had *not* been published by the Balai Pustaka.[10]

9) According to the calculations of one of Rinkes's successors, Drewes, see Jedamski 1992: 31.

10) Results of Volkslectuur in the year 1926, KITLV.

The network of libraries expanded rapidly after 1920. In that year there were already 1200 Public Libraries, with forty to two hundred different titles on the shelves. By 1925 there were approximately 2500 to 3000 libraries. Altogether, books were borrowed two to three million times per year to between 300 000 to 400 000 readers. A large number of civil servants were involved in this provision of reading matter, because the libraries were under the supervision of the Indonesian school committee and of inspectors and adjunct inspectors. A consequence of this was that everything was recorded, leaving an extensive documentation in the annual records of the apparent tastes of Indonesian readers, distinguished by region. It is noticeable that among the Javanese, original Javanese work was more popular than translated works, and that the books in Madurese were not very popular. The famous book *Max Havelaar* (1860), written by the Dutch writer Multatuli on the abuses in the colony, could be borrowed from Balai Pustaka as well. Its presence signifies that the libraries were 'progressive' in a political sense. In 1925, the book was borrowed 210 times by Indonesian readers however, this shrinks in comparison to the 10 000 times that the popular children's book *Gambar Gambar* was borrowed.[11]

Another task of the Balai Pustaka was the translation of government documents into Malay, and the publication of press summaries. From 1918, this 'press agency' was responsible for weekly or monthly summaries of Indonesian and Malay-Chinese news sources (in total about two hundred periodicals!) and also for the complete translation of articles, pamphlets, and the like (Jedamski 1992: 34). And, vice versa, government announcements were translated for publication in domestic periodicals. A random sample of these press summaries shows that in these periodicals, most in Malay, there were many critical articles about the 'measuring with two standards': what the Europeans were allowed to do, the Indonesian people were not. There were also criticisms of how the colonial government managed pilgrims to Mecca. And there were pieces comparing Islam with Christianity, from an Islamic point of view. The Dutch colonial authorities considered this sensitive material.

The Balai Pustaka sent news summaries free of charge to 230 authorities and one could also subscribe to them. The company hired Indonesians for the translations, and their names were recorded in the annual report. The editors of the Balai Pustaka were also sometimes asked to translate secret documents. In 1923, for example, they translated a letter from the leader of the Islamic movement Sarekat Islam (Jedamski 1992: 33). The Balai Pustaka was not just a publishing house but also an information bureau.

11) Results of Volkslectuur 1926, KITLV. *Gambar Gambar* was an illustrated book. See: Borms 2009.

Publisher's List

Officially the *Kantoor voor de Volkslectuur* – the future Balai Pustaka – was set up in response to a problem of educating the Indonesian population: the students were taught the Roman alphabet in school, but outside of school, the only reading matter available to them was written in indigenous alphabets or Arabic characters. Authorities and teachers thought this disadvantageous, 'fatal' even, to their further development. And not only that: 'It was also necessary to prevent the literacy that they had acquired and their capacity for comprehension to lead to less desirable results, to ensure that these would not be exploited by damaging influences, to the detriment of the existing social order, etc.' (Rinkes 1923: 183). The Balai Pustaka had to supply the people with good, positive literature, but above all refrain from religious texts from whatever origin. The rhetoric of conversion was unacceptable. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the publisher had to deal with critical voices from various directions.

In order to whet the appetite for reading, the publishing house chose to publish more popular texts, rather than heavy reading (Rinkes 1911, Kuitert 2020: 219-259). Anyone who examines the 1921 catalogue will see that almost everything was printed in the local languages; only some botanical books were in Dutch. The catalogue is in Malay and subdivided into categories. There are twenty-six novels, twenty-two by local authors and four by Europeans. Indonesian authors include Mangoenwidjaja, Prawirasoedirdja and Soeradipoera. European classics on the list include Jules Verne or Molière, and Dutch writers such as Justus van Maurik are also on the list. In addition, there is a category of morality works and education. The price varies from 20 cents to 75 cents.[12] Manuscripts could be submitted for possible publication. Rinkes wanted to offer a podium for young, indigenous intellectuals in order to negate the need to look elsewhere for an outlet. Despite this intent, in the foreword to the annual report of 1927 it reveals that Rinkes did not always find the quality of this work sufficiently high. Authors were well renumerated by the Balai Pustaka – if we can believe the critical voices in the Dutch parliament. Some members of the parliament were not happy with the government's financial support for Balai Pustaka. Complaints were raised that a writer received 1000 guilders for three 'small books', too much money at that time.[13] Money might have been a means of 'luring' critical writers. But Rinkes proposed: 'Considering that many submissions which we receive are inadequate in form and content and have to be rejected, the editorial staff has been instructed to edit leisure and developmental literature

12) *Catalogus boekoe-boekoe basa djawi wedalan Balé [=Balai] Poestaka ing.* Weltevreden ca. 1921

13) J.G. Scheurer in Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1914-1915, 30 October, Archives of Dutch Parliament.

in the broadest sense, keeping in mind the needs of the indigenous society.' The publishing house declared that lack of substance was the most common reason for rejection, however this cannot be confirmed by archival sources (Rinkes 1911).

Initially, the reading matter selected by Balai Pustaka was tailored to the assumed taste of the Indonesian public: fairy tales and folk tales, in which non-Christian symbolism was frequently woven. It was brasher than people in the Netherlands in those days were accustomed to. 'Her bosom was like pisang fruit'… 'Then they went under a blanket together'. One could find adultery, sexuality and polygamy in the literature of the Balai Pustaka, to the great displeasure of the Christian factions in the Netherlands, who wondered what the subsidies were actually being spent on. After some discussion in the years 1914-1915, Rinkes did indeed withdraw some books from the list, and sanitised others.[14] *Salah Asoehan*, written by Abdoel Moeis, was edited for this reason. The novel tells a story about a Dutch woman who marries an educated indigenous man. They cannot integrate into each other's world. In the original version the Dutch woman is described as promiscuous, and one of her lovers in the end kills her. Moeis was asked by Balai Poestaka to modify these elements to make her die of cholera instead. The novel was published in the new form in 1928, and deemed a classic work in Indonesian literary history (Yamamoto, 2019; Teeuw 1972).

Old Malay texts, which contained religious elements, meant it did not meet the publishing house's guideline with its prohibition against religious texts. Rinkes was however convinced that the traditional folk tales would be the very means, paradoxically enough, of promoting modernisation. These texts provided the publisher with an authentic and reliable image, encouraging Indonesians to read other Balai Pustaka books as well. When, in 1914, a Dutch missionary organisation requested the Balai Pustaka to distribute some missionary books, the publishing house denied this request (Coolsma 1914). According to the missionaries, remaining neutral at the Balai Pustaka only meant 'not Christian' because Islamic influences and superstition were richly represented in the traditional folk tales. Rinkes found himself in a difficult position. Modern books were too brash according to European norms, and the old folk tales seemed to put the younger readers off. Readers found what they were looking for in the Chinese-Malay publishing world, where more contemporary genres were produced. In the opinion of the Balai Pustaka however, these were not the best books in terms of quality, perhaps also mindful of a potential to offend sensibilities (Brondgeest 1930).

In addition to reading matter of an entertaining character, there was also a market for books about health, medical subjects, family planning,

14) Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1916-1917 kamerstuknummer 4 ondernummer 40. Archives of Dutch Parliament.

hygiene, agriculture and the like. Among the knowledge books on the publisher's list are found books on book-keeping, sexual behaviour, such as *Sesalan kawin, roesak keloearga dan sengsara doenia* (*Marriage Regrets, Damage to the Family, and Worldly Suffering*) and a manual for the electrician, published in Malay and Javanese. Balai Pustaka used *wayang* (puppet) characters in the illustrations to introduce subjects, like a visit to the doctor, to those who were not familiar with this. Although religion was not formally included as a subject, the publisher's list contains a book of photographs, *Masdjid dan makam doenia Islam*, or 'The Mosques and Holy Graves of the Islamic World'. Balai Pustaka also published periodicals, in Malay: *Pandji Poestaka* and *Sri Poestaka*. *Sri Poestaka* proved to be a success. We know from annual reports that its circulation was usually around 3000. Yet this pales in comparison with [folk] almanacs with a circulation of 58 000 and published in three ethnic languages.[15] As for books, the Balai Pustaka published 40–50 titles every year, in total around 300 000 volumes (Teeuw, 1950: 78).

The Balai Pustaka chose to publish only in a few of the most widely spoken ethnic languages namely, Javanese, Malay, Madurese and Sundanese. Not only was the language of importance but also the typeface used to print its publications. The Balai Pustaka chose to print almost everything in Roman type. As a result of the emphasis on books in Malay, the publishing house contributed to the formation of a standard Malay language. The Malay of Balai Pustaka was different from, and looser than, the official Malay that was in use by the government. It was also, for example, different from the Chinese-Malay which was used in the publications of the Chinese-Malay publishers. Arabic was not present in the publisher's list of the Balai Pustaka. Why was that?

Political Interest

The Balai Pustaka was careful when it came to printing religious material. Public opinion in the colonial society felt that the discontent of the Indonesian population at the beginning of the twentieth century was channelled via Islam. Islam was not the religion of the colonisers and it was seen as powerful (Snouck Hurgronje, 1883: 10; Steenbrink, 1991). Pilgrims often brought pamphlets from Mecca back with them, which espoused the superiority of Islam. The content was spread orally. For Dutch politics, the information provided by the Islam expert Ch. Snouck Hurgronje was important. He was the government's advisor from 1889; in 1907, Hazeu became advisor and in 1913, Rinkes took over. Snouck advised the spirit of the Indonesian population had to be won over, with, among other things, printed matter.

The discontent within the local, non-Christian population increased under the administration of Governor-General Van Heutz and the call for

15) Results *Volkslectuur* 1926 (KITLV).

independence grew stronger. When, in 1911 or 1912, a group called Sarekat Islam was established, the colonial administration was startled, especially because this group was able to attract supporters very quickly.

Officially, Sarekat Islam was not a political faction; but its goal was to provide mutual support for the indigenous population – who felt dominated politically and economically by the Europeans and economically by the minority of Chinese-Indonesian in the colony. And the flourishing newspaper business in the colony provided an outlet for this discontent. The leader of the Sarekat Islam group was the editor of the newspaper *Oetoesan Hindia* (Korver, 1982). There were several printing-houses which sympathised with the Sarekat Islam, such as Evolutie.[16] And of course newspapers appeared in the local languages (Malay) in which the nationalist movement, Islam and the rising communist movement received attention.

Dutch people saw the Sarekat Islam as an obscure, impenetrable society because non-Muslims were not allowed to become members, and thought secret rituals and spells were used. An anonymous letter to the conservative *Nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch Indië* (the News of the Day for the Dutch East Indies) claimed that members had to give an oath, which 'had to do with the extermination of non-Muslims in Indonesia.' (*Nieuws van den dag voor Nederlandsch Indie,* 24 April 1913). This claim has no evidential basis, but rather members did have to take an oath with a hand on the Koran witnessed by an imam (Ratu-Langie 1913: 18). Dutch people, giving rise to anxiety, could read in the press reports, translated by the Balai Pustaka, that in some divisions of the Sarekat Islam, each member was expected to bring ten new members with him (*Koloniaal tijdschrift* 1, p. 1221). In other journals they read that there was an election for new members, and they had to pay 50 cents (*Koloniaal tijdschrift* 2 nr 1). In 1913, there were 500 000 Sarekat Islam members on Java alone (Ratu-Langie 1913: 15). The Sarekat Islam was so popular that its name was also used as the brand name of a bicycle company in the Dutch East Indies (Van Dijk 2007: 28).

Calls from worried Dutchmen for a ban on the Sarekat Islam were not heeded. The colonial government saw the Sarekat Islam as a way of preventing something worse (Ratu-Langie 2013: 20-21). The Sarekat Islam was not expressly anti-government and was not striving to take power. It was, on the other hand, a mass movement and for that reason only regional societies were allowed and not a national organisation.

When the Sarekat Islam held its first congress, Rinkes managed to

16) According to the material in the Upper House and Lower House, this company received financial support from the Dutch government in 1924. www.statengeneraal.nl: Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1925-1926 kamerstuknummer 5 ondernummer I. Verslag van bestuur en staat van Nederlandsch-Indië, Suriname en Curaçao van 1925; in 1922 a subsidy was also awarded, and other newspapers reacted critically to it.

attend as an observer. He produced a report marked 'secret'.[17] In the report, he states that Arab propagandists in the Dutch East Indies were focussed on promoting Islamic education. In 1900, there were 18 000 Arabs, for the most part businessmen, in the Dutch East Indies (Korver 1982: 6). Rinkes wrote: '[...] there is a wide-spread desire throughout the Muslim world to unify educational programmes, especially with respect to religious education, and furthermore to introduce Arabic as the official language of education, or at least to make the study of that language a requirement, in part in order to have a common language for the exchange of thoughts and feelings, and also to establish a media outlet in every large city or region, a newspaper with a religious foundation, that can disperse unifying ideas to educated adults and keep these ideas there.'[18]

The Balai Pustaka attempted to offer a 'reasonable alternative' with its own printed matter. These included general, informative periodicals, comparable, according to Jedamski, to *Readers Digest* or *The National Enquirer* (Jedamski 1992: 35). Rinkes believed in direct cooperation with those deemed reasonable periodicals, in order to be able to influence public opinion from a Western perspective via Western copy, not only through magazines and newspapers, but also with books (Jedamski 1992: 34). It was through his negotiations that the periodical *Neratja* received a subsidy from the colonial administration.[19] The Balai Pustaka used concerns about the Sarekat Islam and other feelings of discontent within Dutch-minded circles also to promote its library services. Supposedly, the message was sent to businesses through the *Pandji Poestaka* which was to start up a library, because workers will spend less time outside in a position to cause trouble (Jedamski, 1992: 27). The advisory board of the colonial government gave its opinion: '[…] The significance of this [Balai Pustaka] lies in the idea that the indigenous reading public, which is rapidly increasing and is slowly welcoming attractive forms to learn, will understand that there is more in life than the purely negative and destructive slogans carried out by some of the native newspapers and journals. Such reading is therefore a useful counterbalance.' (Kwantes 1975: 80)

But the publishing house was itself in a certain sense partially responsible for the Indonesian nationalist awakening, as the cartoon in Figure 2 shows. Did Balai Bahasa not provide a podium to young intellectuals themselves? The editorial staff of Balai Pustaka comprised young Indonesian members and prominent Sarekat Islam members like A. Moeis, A.H. Wignjadisastra and A. Salim all of whom had written for the Balai Pustaka (Maters 1998: 130).

The publishing house had influenced its readers to become independent

17) The report can be found in the KITLV, Leiden, see footnote 19.

18) 'Rapport tweede Sarekat Islam congres Dr Rinkes dd november 1915'. KITLV, Leiden.

19) Kamerstuk Tweede Kamer 1925-1926 kamerstuknummer 5 ondernummer

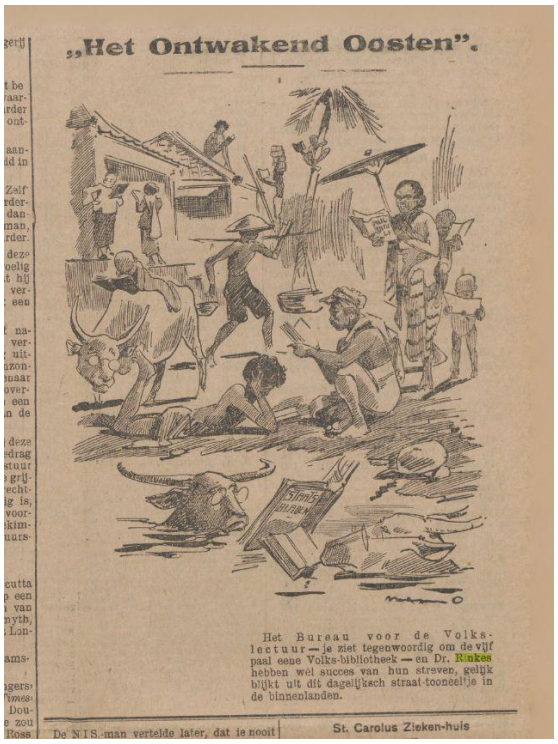

Figure 2. This illustration was published in the newspaper *Het Nieuws van den dag voor Nederlands-Indië*, 18-11-1919. "The East is waking up', it says. Thanks to the Balai Pustaka everyone is reading books instead of doing their regular work."

thinkers, with its sophisticated mix of folk tales, traditional texts and informative books and periodicals, and its prohibition on missionary stories. By promoting Malay as a common language, communication among the indigenous people was made easier and nationalistic feelings grew. Rinkes was perhaps not as neutral as he seemed and was in fact politically active. He was one of the founders of the – not very successful – *Middenpartij* in 1923, a political party which sought independence for Indonesia (*De Indische courant*,15-10-1923). Rinkes is said to have been secretly married to an Indonesian aristocrat, in accordance with Islamic laws (Jedamski, 1995: 201-202). On the website of the Rinkes family, which includes its genealogy, there is no reference to an indigenous aristocrat, only his Dutch wife. It often happened that a Dutch bureaucrat in the colony had a relationship with an indigenous partner. But the rumour could be untrue. Conservative groups, like the newspaper *Nieuws van den Dag in Nederlands-Indie* tried to damage Rinkes' position in debates with these rumours. Rumours that make it easy to portray him as 'biased'. Rinkes was therefore suspected of being a member of the Sarekat Islam. Was it not so that he had given some young intellectuals from the Sarekat Islam a podium in his publishing house? This did not make his position any easier. It was part of his strategy to advance association from two sides and he did in fact move in the direction of the Indonesian nationalists. He wrote: 'Certain seditious elements are understandably not working in the office; some unruly types are, though these usually quickly calm down, surrounded as they are by more moderate people, who bring them to a better understanding, and encourage them to truly useful work' (Jedamski, 1995: 206).

Conclusion

The Balai Pustaka has been a force in Indonesia, not only in education, for which it was established, but also in empowering young Indonesian intellectuals and nationalists – which was counter to its official goal. Rinkes was not as conservative as the colonial government and gave way to Indonesian employees and intellectuals to take their part in the publishing house Balai Pustaka. The book list shows books with educational topics –

albeit with a patronizing attitude. By 1927 Rinkes had withdrew. In the following years of worldwide economic crisis, there was some talk of the publishing house being taken over by a commercial publishing house, G. Kolff & Co (Jedamski 1992: 24-25) but it did not eventuate. In 1942, Balai Pustaka had came into Indonesian hands in its entirety but under severe Japanese censorship. The Balai Pustaka, then, published very little. But after the war, the Balai Pustaka came back, and flourished under the leadership of ST. Pamoentjak. The publishing house still exists, according to the website http://balaipustaka.co.id/.

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