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## REFERENCE

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*Censorship in Colonial Indonesia, 1901–1942*. By Nobuto Yamamoto. Leiden: Brill, 2019. viii+294 pp.

This book describes the methods used by the colonial government to censor the press during the last decades of Dutch rule in Indonesia. As Yamamoto shows, colonial officials were concerned that newspapers, above all vernacular newspapers, could be used to foment opposition to foreign rule and undermine the calm, orderly society that the Dutch prided themselves on maintaining. This was plainly a danger with the nationalist and communist press that emerged in the 1910s and 1920s. Dutch officials were also wary of the political content of Islamic newspapers and the Chinese press in Indonesia. In the 1930s, a new source of anxiety emerged, as officials fretted that the hostility towards Japan expressed in Chinese newspapers would anger the Japanese, whom the Dutch could not afford to provoke.

To combat the perceived danger of the press, the colonial state monitored newspapers, publishing a weekly summary of the Indonesian press (*Overzicht van de Inlandsche Pers*) from 1914 onwards, which was read by government officials. It also promoted “improving” vernacular literature, such as translations of European novels, through the Balai Poestaka (Bureau for Popular Literature), launched in 1908, in an endeavour Yamamoto calls “constructive censorship” (p. 72). For repressive purposes, the colonial state created two legal instruments: the *persdelict* (press offences) law introduced in 1914, and the *persbreidelordonnantie* (press curbing law) introduced

in 1931. The *persdelict* law, based on the British India Press Act of 1910, gave the government the power to imprison for up to seven years those considered by a judge to have “sown hatred” through their writings. It was used against scores of government critics in the interwar years. Enforcement of *persdelict* could backfire, however, as in the case of the communist leader Semaoen, who used his widely reported *persdelict* trial in 1919 as a platform to attack the government. The *persbreidelordonnantie*, brought in after the failed communist uprisings against the government in Java and Sumatra in 1926–27, was a more efficient tool. It allowed the governor-general or prosecutor-general to unilaterally suspend any publication that was deemed a threat to public order, without the need for a public trial. This power, which helped to effectively muzzle the nationalist movement during the 1930s, was used eighty-seven times between 1931 and 1939.

Yamamoto’s book draws extensively on government sources such as reports on the Indonesian press and the correspondence of Dutch officials. By using these sources, he offers a counterpoint to the more familiar historical narrative, put forward most famously by Benedict Anderson (Yamamoto’s doctoral adviser), that focuses on how Indonesian nationalists used vernacular newspapers to promulgate a sense of Indonesian national identity and nationalism in the early twentieth century. In Yamamoto’s book, we see the obverse of this process; that is, how the Dutch assessed and responded to the threat posed by the vernacular press and set about neutralizing it, creating a bureaucracy of censors, translators, monitors and legal enforcers to shadow and constrain the burgeoning anti-colonial movement. A picture emerges of the “inherent paranoia” (p. 1) of the colonial regime, which never felt entirely comfortable or secure in Indonesia, and of the “mechanicality” (p. 2) of state censorship, which went through the laborious process of penalizing journalists, often for fairly petty infractions. Yamamoto is keen to point out that the Dutch censorship bureaucracy was not the all-powerful machine it was sometimes made out to be. Enforcement of *persdelict* and press monitoring did not prevent the communist uprisings of 1926–27,

which took the government by surprise. The implementation of *persdelict*, meanwhile, could be haphazard and, as in the case of Semaoen, self-defeating. Despite the allegedly repressive colonial censorship regime, the number of Malay-language publications rose steadily, doubling from 60 in 1918 to 120 in 1929.

Yamamoto has done a valuable service by writing a clear and comprehensive study of censorship in colonial Indonesia, adding greatly to the previously limited literature on this topic. His book will be of interest not only to those working on the colonial state but also to students of Indonesian nationalism, communism, Islamic movements and the politics of the Indonesian Chinese community, as all of these ran up against the system of official censorship in one way or another. Particularly useful are the empirical sections of the book, which supply tables of *persdelict* and *persbreidel* cases and detail the circulation of Balai Poestaka publications during the interwar years. The author has also compiled helpful information on how many Malay-language books and periodicals were printed during the late-colonial period and who published them. The book ends abruptly with the Japanese defeat of the Dutch in 1942, which, as Yamamoto notes, ushered in a new censorship regime. It would have been worth exploring the legacies of Dutch policies of press censorship for the government of the Indonesian Republic, which, in due course, introduced repressive censorship measures of its own.

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*Moments of Silence: The Unforgetting of the October 6, 1976, Massacre in Bangkok.* By Thongchai Winichakul. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020. xi+322 pp.

Long before I knew anything about Thailand or the horrific violence perpetrated by right-wing thugs and state actors against Thammasat