ANDRE SYAHREZA

The topicality of pre-colonial Indonesian heroes

Recent popular fiction from Indonesia

Agus Sunyoto, *Dhaeng Sekara: Telik sandi tanah pelik Majapahit*. Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2010, 488 pp. ISBN 9786029782820. Price: IDR 55.000.

Bagus Dilla, *Bumi Sriwijaya*. Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2010, 483 pp. ISBN 9786029782738. Price: IDR 58.000.

Daryanto, *Raden Fatah: Bara di atas Demak Bintara*. Jakarta: Tiga Kelana, 2009, vi + 472 pp. ISBN 9786028535304.

Enang Rokajat Asura, *Prabu Siliwangi: Bara di balik terkoyaknya Raja Digdaya*. Depok: Edelweiss, 2009, ix + 457 pp. ISBN 9789791962438.

Enang Rokajat Asura, *Wangsit Siliwangi: Harimau di tengah bara*. Depok: Edelweiss, 2009, 444 pp. ISBN 9786028672009.

Gamal Komandoko, *Panembahan Senopati: Geger ramalan Sunan Giri*. Yogyakarta: DIVA Press, 2009, 400 pp. ISBN 9789799637086.

Langit Kresna Hariadi, *Gajah Mada*. Solo: Tiga Serangkai, 2004, x + 582 pp. ISBN 9796685582.

Langit Kresna Hariadi, *Gajah Mada: Bergelut dalam kemelut takhta dan angkara*. Solo: Tiga Serangkai, 2006, xii + 508 pp. ISBN 9793301902.

Langit Kresna Hariadi, *Gajah Mada: Hamukti palapa*. Solo: Tiga Serangkai, 2006, x + 694 pp. ISBN 9793303166.

Langit Kresna Hariadi, *Gajah Mada: Perang Bubat*. Solo: Tiga Serangkai, 2006, xii + 448 pp. ISBN 9793304499.

Langit Kresna Hariadi, *Gajah Mada: Madakaripura Hamukti moksa*. Solo: Tiga Serangkai, 2007, x + 582 pp. ISBN 9793307129.

Nassirun Purwokartun, *Penangsang: Tembang rindu dendam*. Jakarta: Tiga Kelana, 2010, xvi + 704 pp. ISBN 9786028535847.

SW. Warsito and Harmadi, *Airlangga*. Yogyakarta: Flash Books, 2010, 389 pp. ISBN 9786029556735.

Over the past decade, a new genre of Indonesian fiction has boomed. Prominently displayed, and illustrated with eye-catching covers, these stories are set in pre-colonial Indonesia and explore great missions in glorious pre-colonial kingdoms such as Sriwijaya, Majapahit, Pajajaran, Kahuripan, Mataram, and Demak. Appearing in mainstream bookstores and strategic book stands across Indonesia, especially in major cities, these novels are reviewed in mass media, quoted in personal blogs and Facebook pages, and discussed in book seminars. Featuring familiar military and political figures from ancient times like Gajah Mada, Raden Fatah, Airlangga, Brawijaya, Prabu Siliwangi, and Panembahan Senopati, these dramatizations of celebrated history take on epic form, offering an idealized past for the contemporary imagined nation. The names of Indonesian pre-colonial heroes are familiar to most Indonesians as monuments, street names, universities, five star hotels, and other prominent institutions. But popular literature has tended to focus on the more recent past. Pramoedya Ananta Toer has chronicled Indonesia's colonial past in novels, short stories, and histories, so the historical novel has not just suddenly bloomed on the landscape. Next to that, there now seems to be a revival of an old, formerly state supported genre, that depicts in popular fiction certain pre-colonial, even primordial adventures in shaping the modern nation and its people. What is new is that this genre now reaches a large audience. At the beginning of the twenty-first century's second decade, and in Reformasi Indonesia, what may we understand from this publishing spree and widespread consumption of an imagined, glorious Indonesian past? Set in eras of expanding political power, evoking ancient spiritual practices, or early Indonesian Islam, celebrating heroic folk figures and pre-colonial buildings, the 13 books discussed here tell stories of trust and betrayal, war and unity, as well as romanticism and mysticism. This review highlights eight recent historical novels and a series of five novels about Gajah Mada, probably the most famous pre-colonial figure in Indonesia today.

The authors are working journalists, ex-journalists, or people involved in popular media as freelance writers and cartoonists. They also often work for large private companies or hold governmental positions. Daryanto (who wrote *Raden Fatah*) worked for Suara Karya, a widely distributed daily news-

paper owned by the biggest political party in the New Order regime. Later he became the Head of the Tourism Division in the Semarang City Council. The author of *Dhaeng Sekara* is a journalist for *Jawa Pos* while he also produces short fiction there and in other publications. A self-taught expert on the controversial Muslim saint Syech Siti Jenar, he has also written a historical novel. The author of the Prabu Siliwangi series, E. Rokajat Asura, is a productive freelancer who works full time in a corporation, and the author of *Panembahan Senopati* is also a freelance writer who has published few novels about Islam and history. Another writer with a strong Islamic school background is Bagus Dilla, author of *Bumi Sriwijaya*, who co-founded the Al Quran study community and a small publishing house in Yogyakarta. Nassirun Purwokartun, the author of *Penangsang* is a cartoonist, a graphic designer, and a poet. One of his cartoon collections came out with Taman Budaya Jawa Tengah (a cultural association in Central Java), and his drawing book for children was put out by the Indonesian Heritage Foundation, which follows the slogan 'Membangun bangsa berkarakter' (Build the nation's character). Finally, Langit Kresna Hariadi, author of the recent Gajah Mada Series, wrote for the theatre, was a radio announcer and a journalist for *Harian ABRI* – the daily newspaper produced by the Indonesian army. The Gajah Mada Series made him a household name and he is often asked to speak at venues around the country. He was also involved in the declaration of Komunitas Peduli Majapahit (Majapahit Care Community), which aims to protect and preserve Majapahit heritage.

Publishers of these novels also enjoy a strong national pedigree. They are commercial institutions with nationwide distribution operating out of Jakarta, Depok, Solo, and Yogyakarta. The Gajah Mada Series is published by Tiga Serangkai, based in Solo, Central Java, and has issued textbooks since 1959. Larger, more established publishers like Tiga Serangkai can promote their books, print in abundance, and distribute widely – which helps popularize their books. If the public is not interested, of course, big budgets and publishing infrastructure will not make people buy, but in the case of certain stories like each volume of Langit Kresna Hariadi's *Gajah Mada*, a well-heeled publisher can turn a pleasing book into a best seller. *Gajah Mada* originally appeared in 3000 to 4000 copies for a one-time printing, but by mid 2011, each volume had been reprinted at least three times – likely the best sales for a pre-colonial novel in the last decade. In recent years, publishers have been joined by active readers in the fate of books. With the ubiquity of blogs and Facebook, readers themselves advocate for what they like and may complement or challenge publishers' agendas and bottom lines.

In other words, there is not a single, straightforward, or easy answer as to how and why novels with pre-colonial themes have become trendy, beloved, and celebrated. Publishers, readers, writers, subject matter, style, fads, legal climates, and official agendas all influence a book's reception. Every novel

under review here presents historical reconstructions that follow standardized Indonesian accounts, the familiar versions of pre-colonial stories and figures used for nationalistic purposes that have appeared in school textbooks since Indonesia's independence. With some minor personal modifications to Gajah Mada, Airlangga, and Sri Jayanasa, most authors follow the state-authorized storyline dating from the Soekarno and Soeharto regimes (compare Reid 2011; Supomo 1979; Wood 2005). The classic example is *Gajah Mada*, the biography written by the nationalist Minangkabau lawyer, later Minister of Education, Muhammad Yamin, and first published in 1945 (Yamin 1945). Before turning to the other eight historical novels, I will explore this historiography of Gajah Mada, which seems like a template for the genre.

Revisiting Gajah Mada

First published in 1945, *Gajah Mada: Pahlawan persatuan Nusantara* (Gajah Mada: A hero of the unity of the Archipelago) tells of a great hero who, in Yamin's words, was 'forgotten by the despotic history'. Yamin's evocation of Gajah Mada, using large passages of the *Negarakertagama* and, indirectly, colonial scholarship, became the standard textbook for school. It explicitly locates Indonesia's golden age in the fourteenth century Majapahit kingdom (centered in East Java), and describes Gajah Mada as its visionary architect, who comes from nowhere and rises from mere '*rakyat*' to a prominent commander, and who dreams of a united Indonesia. When evaluated in the context of nationalism and the revolutionary spirit in which it was conceived and published, the appeal of Yamin's *Gajah Mada* is not hard to understand. He wrote in a fluent style that was both stirring and patriotic, and set readerly expectations for other versions of Gajah Mada. It also helped to define the emerging genre of patriotic novels of mythic adventure stories written in common, accessible language. Today Gajah Mada enjoys considerable esteem. This fourteenth century military general and patih (prime minister) of the Majapahit kingdom is especially famous for his Sumpah Palapa, the legendary oath in which he swore not to eat any spices, before he had united all kingdoms in the archipelago under Majapahit.

Nowadays, Gajah Mada seems to have achieved broad acceptance and affection, not so much with Yamin's novel, but with Langit Kresna Hariadi's series. In the five book series on Gajah Mada, Hariadi depicts Gajah Mada's life from his early career to his magical end. In Hariadi's rendering, Gajah Mada emerges as a person with no clear origin, of unknown parents, of unknown descent, and who vanishes into a mythical grave where he is believed to have experienced *moksa*, or final release from the cycle of birth, life, death and reincarnation. Hariadi's Gajah Mada is a folk hero who is at

once modest, charismatic and powerful: a non-partisan figure which diverse Indonesians can identify with and cherish.

The first volume tells about his service as a talented soldier in rescuing Majapahit from foreign attack. Along with his notorious band of a dozen or so capable Bayangkara troops (palace guards), Gajah Mada beats back the brutal assault, and saves the king from the attempted coup. The second volume, full of palace intrigue, tells of his role in saving the kingdom from internal fragmentation within the king's family when King Jayabaya dies and Majapahit divides in two successor regions. The fourth book explores the low point of Gajah Mada's career when Majapahit gets entangled in a long, bloody war that weakens and briefly topples the Majapahit empire. The last book follows Gajah Mada to his end where he leaves earthly form to become a sort of saint. He declares his ultimate freedom and sacrifice by departing his physical existence for the afterlife – like the ascension of Jesus Christ. It is a dramatic and sentimental finale. But the heart of the series lies in the third book, which explores Gajah Mada's oath to unite other kingdoms in the archipelago under Majapahit rule.

This third novel chronicles Majapahit's difficulties, its hard times in facing the monumental natural disasters of droughts and earthquakes, and the kingdom is continually destabilized as well from internal conflicts, attempted coups, and the secessions of small kingdoms under Majapahit rule. The theme of national unity resonates strongly today, where bringing together Indonesia's diverse peoples and places is a common sentiment. But in ancient times, as today, local alliances and national harmony were not easily achieved. Only a heroic figure like Gajah Mada would be strong enough, and savvy enough, to draw together and unify all these people, and even for him, it was almost impossible. The climax of Gajah Mada's career occurs when he overcomes these staggering challenges, receives the title of Mahapatih, and swears his famous oath to the people, the Sumpah Palapa. Gajah Mada appeals as a figure who is at once superhuman and ordinary, a person who is wise and daring yet vulnerable and makes mistakes. If this series of novels emphasizes themes of national togetherness, loyalty, and love for Indonesia's people, they are not just boring propaganda tracts. They are full of travel, adventure, excitement, battles, power struggles, family dynamics, romance, spirituality, and suspense. These elements work together in various ways to promote a sort of multicultural nationalism through action-packed stories and nostalgia for an imagined glory. The Javanese kingdom was once so powerful and influential along the archipelago, even considerably bigger than Indonesia today, and Gajah Mada is still remembered as the unifier of Nusantara.

Steeped in spirituality

Like the Gajah Mada Series, most of the eight novels under review follow the accepted historical interpretations, yet with a few twists. Only Nassirun Purwokartun really breaks the mold. Set at the end of the kingdom of Demak, his novel tells of a popular figure called Arya Penangsang, the grandson of Raden Fatah (the first king of Demak). In *Penangsang: Tembang rindu dendam*, he casts Arya Penangsang as a hero, instead of a notorious betrayer as is usually the case. Purwokartun suggests that this foundational figure to Indonesia has been tragically misunderstood. Penangsang was not a quisling or a scoundrel but a great figure, a leader with strong character, a gentleman and a warrior of God, also a dedicated son who avenged the killing of his father by the fourth king of Demak. If Purwokartun is unusual in straying from accepted history, he is typical in his use of pre-colonial narratives and cultural figures. Because this new wave of novels explores pre-colonial times, the political messages come through more as allegory than as history.

And, to an even greater extent than the titillation of royal drama, these novels are steeped in spirituality and mysticism. In fact, these books may have more in common with myths or with comics than with history – which is to say, they resonate not only as allegory but also on a variety of popular levels, all of which serve to reinforce and deepen a particular, Indonesian, national subject. Though thoroughly political, the genre's general messages are ostensibly personal: ultimately, these stories urge individual responsibility and noble behavior. The way to glory is not always through seizing power, winning battles, or becoming king. Instead, turning inward and maintaining faith, showing loyalty to tradition and one's countrymen is what demonstrates honor and commands respect. One place we see this view articulated is in *Panembahan Senopati: Geger ramalan Sunan Giri*, a novel about Panembahan Senopati, the descendant of Majapahit who kills Arya Penangsang and rejects the opportunity to become king of Pajang in order to withdraw and immerse himself in the spiritual world. Though he did not remain an ascetic, he became purified and gained admiration by taking the spiritual path. Eventually, this did result in material rewards. He later led Mataram, a small kingdom that became a great empire throughout Java under the leadership of Senopati. The novel's form sends its message: *Panembahan Senopati* is laced with spells and prayers, evoking the magic and rhythms at play in this spiritual adventure story. And though the story is patriotic, it is not entirely patriarchal. For instance, Ratu Kidul, the mythical Queen of the South Sea is a powerful figure in her own right who is moved and persuaded by Panembahan's spiritual integrity, and she sends her ghost troops to support Senopati's war with their own war equipment (p. 291). Yet here and elsewhere, myth and magic stand out more than history or gender dynamics.

Spiritualism and mysticism can be also found in *Dhaeng Sekara: Telik sandi tanah pelik Majapahit*. This novel follows a low profile figure in Majapahit, Dhaeng Sekara, a secret service agent who works for Diah Kertawijaya, King of Tumapel, which was an influential kingdom under Majapahit. An ordinary man loyal to the empire, Dhaeng's job is to inform on any suspicious plans against Majapahit. Naturally, in order to do this, he must have a good *olah kanuragan* (a martial arts technique that combines physical and metaphysical power). There it is in a nutshell: an action hero, a spiritual man, and a regular guy supporting his country! Actually, this novel (and the genre in general) may owe less to literary heritage than to kung fu movies. This story follows our hero from one village to another as he faces enemies and struggles to defend himself. The novel's political and spiritual elements take a back seat in these exciting fight scenes. But the stories are not all action, either. On another level, both *Dhaeng Sekara* and *Panembahan Senopati* use pre-colonial history to convey the depth and power of spirituality and mysticism in Indonesia.

These themes reflect how pre-colonial times are understood by most Indonesians today as fundamental to national identity. Currently, many pre-colonial landmarks (such as those in Trowulan, the former heart of the Majapahit kingdom) have become favorite places for people interested in spirituality and supernatural powers. There are dozens of spiritual communities, such as Komunitas Spiritual Indonesia or Sekretariat Kerjasama Kepercayaan, that hold regular events to 'meet' with the spirits of Majapahit figures. These groups believe they can 'communicate' with the late kings of Majapahit, Gajah Mada or other figures from pre-colonial times. Members of these communities range from ordinary people to small time governmental officials and high military officers. So, to contemporary Indonesians, there is little wonder why these novels' pre-colonial dramas seem natural, even inevitable.

The spirituality in these novels also carefully sidesteps potential sectarian conflict. Although many focus on Hindu-Java kingdoms, religion does not appear with a capital R, except perhaps to some extent in stories where Islam is concerned. In fact, there are no religious notions explicitly mentioned. Religion only appears as an implicit theme in the novels that take the end of the Buddhist and Hindu Majapahit kingdom or the beginning of the Islamic kingdom of Demak as their setting. Daryanto's Raden Fatah conveys a message in which the Wali Songo – as a representation of Islamic authority – plays an important role to suggest moral and political movement in the Demak kingdom. And in *Dhaeng Sekara*, Agus Sunyoto uses esoteric Islamic terms to build the main character, but religion does not drive the story. Above all, these novels are animated less by religion or spirituality than by a sort of primordial national sensibility.

Fiction and history

Clearly, Gajah Mada is not the only series to promote nationalism by invoking a glorious pre-colonial Indonesia. In addition to the Majapahit empire, Sriwijaya was another big kingdom associated with early Indonesia. As described on its back cover, the publishers frame Bumi Sriwijaya as one of the world's great ancient empires, alongside those of Rome, Greece, Egypt, China, and India, and the blurb compares the first king, Sri Jayanasa, to Julius Caesar and Genghis Khan. *Bumi Sriwijaya* follows the great steps of Dapunta Hyang Sri Jayanasa, who lived long before Majapahit, in the seventh century. Dapunta Hyang Sri Jayanasa is also represented as caring and charismatic, a sincere person who listens to and understands his rakyat, his people. This novel consists of short chapters with a straightforward plot that reconstructs the story of Sriwijaya, who was once believed to have a great influence throughout Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and Cambodia today. Unsurprisingly, adventure novels that explore Indonesia's exalted past play fast and loose with historical facts and research.

Nevertheless, the genre is often presented as portraying or merely dramatizing actual history. There is typically a special index of an author's research which may be limited to a handful of texts or may expand over several pages. Commonly consulted secondary sources include *Kerajaan-kerajaan Islam pertama di Jawa* (the first Islamic kingdoms in Java, an Indonesian translation of a 1974-work by the two formerly colonial scholars H.J. de Graaf and Th.G.Th. Pigeaud, see De Graaf and Pigeaud 1985), and *Runtuhnya kerajaan Hindu-Jawa dan timbulnya negara-negara Islam di Nusantara* (The fall of the Hindu-Javanese kingdoms and the rise of the Islamic states in Nusantara) by Slamet Muljana (2005; 1968). The authors also refer to old Javanese historical sources that scholars have used to study the history of the spread of Islam in Java, like the chronicles of the *Babad Tanah Jawi*, or, for the political history of the Majapahit kingdom, the *kakawin* (poem) *Negarakertagama* and the Kawi-language *Pararaton* (Book of Kings). The novels also refer to recent academic papers, newspaper articles and blogs.

With such publishing dynamics and these novels' pretenses to historical accuracy, a comparison with the work of literary giant Pramoedya Ananta Toer seems unavoidable. In addition to stellar literary achievement and international acclaim, Pramoedya is respected as a master of recreating history in the novel. However, Pramoedya was not only a writer but a popular leftist figure who spent 15 years in prison – first under the Dutch, then under Soeharto. Most of his historical novels, like the famous Buru Quartet, are set in colonial times and explore the birth of the Indonesian nation. During his imprisonment in Buru Pramoedya not only composed the Buru Quartet, but he also wrote three novels, only published after the New Order, set in pre-

colonial environments: *Arus Balik* (Pramoedya 1995), *Arok Dedes* (Pramoedya 1999; see also Pramoedya 1976), and *Mangir* (Pramoedya 2000). *Arok Dedes* tells the story of Ken Arok, a notorious figure in Indonesia's distant past who organized the first 'coup d'état' in Javanese history. Pramoedya gave Ken Arok a new dimension, situating him in modern Indonesia and drawing a parallel between Arok and Soeharto, a critique marking the suspicious transition of power from Soekarno to Soeharto. By contrast with Pramoedya's deft talents as a journalist, researcher, historian, and writer, this new genre of novels comes off as sloppy and poorly written. But in many ways, focusing on literary qualities or asserting a high versus low art comparison misses the point. So far, this new fiction has little artistic or historical merit, but it has generated plenty of interest and a wide readership, and for those reasons it deserves our attention. What is fascinating about these books is not their supposed erudition or achievement; these pre-colonial, spiritual-political adventures are notable for their wide consumption across contemporary Indonesia. People are reading and talking about them. Reflecting on their appeal offers insight to contemporary life in Indonesia.

After the fall of Soeharto in 1998, the new government promised freedom of expression, and some books that had been banned under the Soeharto regime were reprinted, including a number of Pramoedya's. New policies showed a little more flexibility in tolerating previously outlawed historical views, though of course maintained control over the events around the 1965 coup and the subsequent mass killings. But historic figures that had been maligned could now be reinterpreted in books and published with seductive covers. As long as the stories were not overtly political (and this fiction is safely set in the distant past) and as long as the stories' cultural agenda dovetailed with official narratives, the government has been happy to let the genre flourish.

Prominent titles have included the series of *Bapak Bangsa* (founding fathers), which consists of four books of four 'founding fathers' that include Sutan Sjahrir and Tan Malaka alongside contemporary founding heroes like Soekarno and Hatta. In the New Order version of history, Sutan Sjahrir was never mentioned as *Bapak Bangsa*, and Tan Malaka, though officially a national hero, was downplayed due to his sympathy for communism – deeply threatening and taboo to the regime since the 1965 coup and subsequent massacres. Battles and power struggles, issues of devotion and loyalty, ethnic pride and passion: these volatile issues are permissible if they are set in pre-colonial times. In today's landscape, they are potentially dangerous. But it is not accurate to claim that these stories are always and necessarily read only as thinly-veiled political critiques of the contemporary situation. Of course, some readers may understand certain stories that way; some readers may be drawn into the adventures; for some the attraction lies in Indonesian myth

and history; some enjoy the personal codes of honor, spirituality, and asceticism. No doubt there are many more reasons people adore this genre.

Nor, in considering the government position, should one claim merely that allowing the publishing and distribution of these pre-colonial narratives helps to deflect criticisms of contemporary policies. It is also about recognizing that so many colonial and contemporary figures are seen as partisan, not as broadly representative Indonesians. Ironically, what the popularity of these novels suggests is that the most 'Indonesian' characters come from a time when Indonesia did not exist. In many ways, this could be a comforting thought for the public: that there was a time before modern divisions, segregations, and industrial violence, that in the pre-colonial, primordial 'nation' we were all just Indonesians. In our current climate, it is hard to think of anyone generally accepted as representing 'the people.' Sometimes, even Soekarno is not a figure for all Indonesians; Kartini represents women and educational issues; Sudirman stands for patriotism and the military; Imam Bonjol is a Sumatran hero, while Javanese honor Diponegoro. The new genre of popular fiction erases boundaries that partitioned Indonesia and brings a colorful, grandiose vision for national unification, a *Negara Kesatuan* or United States. Majapahit, Sriwijaya, Mataram, and other 'unitary states' from the pre-colonial time are invoked to build national pride. Tall tales, heroes, and ancient kingdoms represent the glories of Indonesia; they commemorate Indonesia's greatness. But strictly speaking, this is not the first time cultural strategies have worked to foment national pride, solidarity, and accord.

Though this genre of popular fiction may be a legacy of the Old and the New Order, it clearly has older historical antecedents. Indonesian nationalist thinkers and activists in the 1920s had already hit upon such notions. Tjipto Mangoenkoesoemo, Soewardi Soerjaningrat, and Soekarno are probably the first nationalists who used pre-colonial stories to inspire national consciousness. They cheered the grandeur of these pre-colonial kingdoms in a one-dimensional fashion, ignoring diverse social structures, belief systems, and economies. Their point was not to celebrate Indonesian diversity but to rally support for national independence. Common opposition to the Dutch colonizer resolved the question of national identity (Reid 1979). After the success of Soekarno, Soeharto followed a similar strategy to strengthen national heritage but linked it to a far more limited vision, one basically supporting his regime, not necessarily the nation. The New Order regime was chiefly interested in promoting a vague Buddhist and Hindu Java past, a past still apparent in the monuments of Borobudur and Prambanan (Wood 2005).

Today, by contrast, heritage politics in these books are used against a common enemy that is not communism but fundamentalism, another discourse of disintegration, or at least one whose loyalties compete with the nation. With their focus on the original greatness of pre-colonial Indonesia (with

an emphasis on male prowess, and by and large Java centered) the authors under review emphasize the pristine nature of the strong state in the pre-colonial past. In that sense, these historical novels are more New Order in nature that we might expect in the so-called democratic and decentralized era. But at least today the relative freedom of media allows people to express their opinions without any real threat from the authority, and that is not limited to but includes the latest books of fiction. Neither great art nor pure propaganda, these books, packaged for popular consumption, express nostalgia and hunger for national freedom. Some include pictures of ancient structures and inscriptions, most contain poor editing and writing, corny dialogue, and trite plots. But for living room readers with popcorn, they are riveting.

Going forward from here, will the reformasi and Indonesian democracy continue after the next election in 2014? And how will this genre evolve?

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