

# **ROMAN MEDAN: THE NATURE AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT OF A CORPUS IN SUMATRAN POPULAR LITERATURE, 1930s-1960s<sup>1</sup>**

***(Roman Medan: Dunia dan Konteks Sosiopolitik sebuah Korpus Sastera Popular di Sumatera, 1930an-1960an)***

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## **Abstract**

*Roman Medan* is the name given to one of the major corpuses of Indonesian popular literature that was mostly published in Medan, the most important city in the northern part of Sumatra, since the 1930s onwards—the final decades of the colonial era. The corpus survived for about decades before disappearing in the late 1960s. Another term given to these works was *roman Sumatera* (Sumatran novels), while the Dutch scholar R. Roolvink called them dubbeltjes-roman (*roman pitjisan* in Indonesian, literally meaning “dime novel”), which reflects a rather disparaging attitude. This article explores the nature, socio-political and historical contexts of *roman Medan*, especially relating to the cultural politics in Indonesia towards the end of the Dutch colonial period. In this way, it is hoped that readers will get a clear picture of the position of the corpus, textually and sociologically, in the history of modern Indonesian literature.

Keywords: *roman Medan*, *roman Sumatera*, *roman pitjisan*, popular literature, literary history, cultural politics, colonialism, Dutch East Indies, modern Indonesian literature

**Abstrak**

Roman Medan adalah nama yang diberikan untuk satu korpus besar sastra populer berbahasa Indonesia yang kebanyakan terbit di Medan, bandar terpenting di bagian utara Pulau Sumatera sejak tahun 1930-an, dekad-dekad akhir Zaman Koolonial. Korpus ini bertahan selama sekitar 4 dekad sebelum menghilang di akhir 1960-an. Istilah lain yang diberikan kepadanya adalah roman Sumatera, sementara sarjana Belanda R. Roolvink menyebutnya roman pitjisan yang mengesankan pandangan yang agak meremehkan. Rencana ini mendedahkan lingkup dunia daripada roman Medan dan konteks sosiopolitik dan kesejarahannya, khususnya yang terkait dengan politik budaya di Indonesia di akhir zaman penjajahan Belanda. Dengan begitu, diharapkan pembaca mendapat gambaran yang jelas mengenai kedudukan korpus ini secara tekstual dan sosiologi dalam sejarah kesusasteraan Indonesia moden.

*Kata kunci:* roman Medan, roman Sumatera, roman pitjisan, sastra populer, sejarah sastra, politik budaya, kolonialisme, Hindia Belanda, kesusasteraan Indonesia moden

**INTRODUCTION**

This article focuses on *roman Medan* (Medan novels), which first began to appear in Medan in the late 1920s and continued to be produced until the late 1960s (Nobuto, 1995; Atisah, 2010; Koko, 2018). *Roman Medan* are a corpus of popular Indonesian literature that can only be found in Sumatra. These popular novels have not been the subject of much research. Unlike Indonesian-Chinese Malay literature,<sup>2</sup> for which a bibliography has been compiled by Claudine Salmon almost 40 years ago (Salmon, 1981), there has been no obvious effort to compile an (annotated) bibliography of *roman Medan* even until now. The latest study by Koko Hendri Lubis (2018) also does not focus on this effort but instead discuss the narratives of *roman Medan* from the sociological perspective of literature as well as their contribution to culture.

*Roman Medan* were published by local publishers in Medan and its smaller surrounding towns, such as Tebing Tinggi, Sigli and Langsa. These popular literary works were also published in Bukittinggi and Padang.<sup>3</sup> The publishers of *roman Medan* themselves referred to this genre as *madjallah roman populer* (also spelled “populer” or “popoeler”). Another term used was *roman pitjisan*, which gave a rather disparaging impression

(Siti, 1963). Generally, the term *pitjisan* (a translation of the Dutch word *dubbeltjes*, meaning “dime” or 10 cents), which originally only meant “cheap”, came to denote works of little literary value. The term was made popular after A. Teeuw translated the article by R. Roolvink, “De Indonesiase ‘dubbeltjes-roman’”<sup>4</sup> as “Roman pitjisan bahasa Indonesia” [“The Indonesian Dime Novel”] (see Roolvink in Teeuw, 1952, pp. 239-251).

This article reveals the world of *roman Medan*, the historical context responsible for its emergence and growth as well as the socio-cultural effects it brought about, especially in terms of spreading literacy outside the intellectual elite and local nobility in Indonesia. The discussion focuses on explaining the nature of *roman Medan* by identifying the stakeholders involved in the production of such popular literature. However, these aspects have not received much attention in prior research on this corpus.

The compilation technique and argumentation is based on an extensive library research and a textual analysis of the narrative of major texts or marginalia as primary sources, that is, a number of *roman Medan*, while secondary sources are newspapers, magazines and the like. It is hoped that this article will be able to bridge the research gap that still exists to enrich the body of knowledge about *roman Medan*, so that this corpus can be put in its appropriate place in the context of the historical development of (popular) culture in Indonesia and its contributions to the spread of literacy among Indonesians.

## **CULTURAL POLITICS AND MODERNITY: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The European colonialism of the rest of the world in the past was, in fact, a conquest by human beings over one another using military force and cultural strategy. The same situation occurred in Indonesia over the three-and-a-half centuries under Dutch colonial rule. The successful annexation of the vast Indonesian archipelago by the Dutch was not only because they had superior military technology but also because they actively studied the culture and character of the local populace for use in their colonial policies.

In 1908, the colonial administration of the Dutch East Indies in Batavia established the *Commissie voor de Inlandsche School en Volkslectuur* or Balai Poestaka (Book Centre). Its aim was to publish books (including literary texts) in Malay and several regional languages (Sundanese,

Javanese, Madurese, etc.) for distribution among the Indonesians as a way to realize their ethical politics (*Ethische Politiek*), which the Dutch had begun in 1901, and which in reality was already too late. The establishment of Balai Poestaka was a part of the language and culture politics of the Dutch in Indonesia (Jedamski, 1992a, 1992b, 1997). The Dutch did not want to teach their own language to the locals because they were of the opinion that it would endanger their own political situation as it would enlighten the local populace. They preferred to study and learn more about the cultures of the locals themselves to get to know their character and use this to retain their hegemony over the colony. Two Dutch universities where the languages and culture of the colony (the Dutch East Indies) were taught were Leiden University and the Delft Academy (Fasseur, 1993).

Balai Poestaka became the cultural or moral “police” that controlled the local Indonesian populace. The books that were published by Balai Poestaka had to fulfil certain language, cultural and moral standards, according to the taste of the colonial powers (the Dutch). Balai Poestaka did not publish the texts of local intellectuals that contained views critical of the colonialists. This caused a reaction among Indonesian intellectuals. They found their own way outside the publishing track provided by Balai Poestaka. In this way, the emergence of *roman Medan* was in fact an antithesis to the domination and control that Balai Poestaka had over the local language and culture. The emergence of the *roman Medan* corpus was an oppositional reaction to Balai Poestaka, whether politically (Faizah, 1976; Nobuto, 1995; Sri, 2011; Horton, 2012<sup>5</sup>; Koko, 2018) or in terms of language (Siti, 1963; Faizah, 1980). This is in agreement with the argument that popular culture also plays an important part in shaping anti-hegemonic views such as anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, while at the same time playing a role in shaping feelings of nationalism (Danke, 2004). The oppositional reaction to Balai Poestaka expressed through *roman Medan* increased the activities of local publishers and printers, resulting in the publication of popular novels that spread literacy in a larger segment of the local populace than was reached by Balai Poestaka.

The Industrial Revolution that took place in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century also changed the face of colonies in Asia. Old towns grew and new ones—built to produce raw material for factories in Europe—mushroomed in areas related to agricultural industry (tobacco, rubber, sugar cane, etc.). The products of this European technology flowed back to the colonies, creating “modern” cities that formed an urban culture. It was marked by two important elements: the spread of print literacy among the local

populace that resulted in an increasingly widespread literacy and the growth of a popular culture expressed in art, music, film, performing arts, popular literature and the like (Plomp, 2012). The colonial language and culture policy planned by the Dutch, and the modernization in the Dutch East Indies as a direct or indirect result of the Industrial Revolution in Europe, were two influencing factors. To understand the complexity of the nature and historical context of roman Medan, together with all the socio-cultural and political effects this genre brought about, these two aforementioned factors form the theoretical foundation of this article. This will be elaborated upon in the following sections.

### **MEDAN IN THE EARLY 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: A MODERN CITY AND POPULAR CULTURE**

The emergence of *roman Medan* cannot be separated from the rapid development of Medan at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Medan developed quickly after the tobacco plantation industry (*onderneming*) in Deli was started by the Dutch at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The social interaction with international migrants created a social dynamic that was unique to Medan. This was reflected in many writings and literary works, chief among these are the novels *Rubber* by M. H. Székely-Lulofs (1931) and *Merantau ke Deli* by Hamka (1939). In a visit to Medan in 1926, the well-known journalist, Parada Harahap, noted how populous, developed and glamorous the city was. Cinemas (*bioscoop*), cafés and shops in the business district of Kesawan (Figure 1) were places that displayed the modernity and worldliness of Medan's inhabitants. It was a common sight to see men and women dressed to the nines going to the cinemas (*bioscoop*), such as the *Empire Bioscope*, *Oranje Bioscoop* or *Royal Bioscope*, to watch films or *bangsawan* opera performances (Parada, 1926). Through the cinema screens, Medan's inhabitants absorbed the popular culture of Europe and America.

The heterogeneity of Medan's inhabitants made this city develop quickly into a city with international flair. This was one of the important elements that Wan Abdul Kadir Wan Yusoff (1988) called "budaya popular dalam masyarakat bandaran" ["the popular culture of the urban community"].

Medan was the centre of Sumatra's tobacco trade, and its populace was a multiethnic mix of Javanese, Acehnese, Chinese, Malays, Europeans, Indians from the coast of Malabar, Bengalis, Batak and Indonesian from Bawean, Banjar and many other parts of the



**Figure 1** Kesawan, the well-known business district of Medan, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

(Source: Loderichs *et al.*, 1997, p. 136)

archipelago. Its history as a *plantersstad* (planters' city) dated back only to the establishment of the head office of the Deli Maatschappij in Medan in 1870. Medan rapidly developed in the decades that followed. Chinese shops, hotels, banks, European club, and a variety of governmental and mercantile offices were established in quick order. Audiences in Medan were cosmopolitan, accustomed to the sounds of the local bands the Manila Muziekcorps and the Cecilia Banda, and culturally conditioned to English variety theatre and operetta. A large percentage of the European elite were in fact not Dutch, but English; Straits dollars were preferred over guilders at many stores; and British holidays such as Queen Victoria's Diamond jubilee were public celebrations.

(Cohen, 2006, p. 264)

The glamour and modernity of Medan at the time was attractively reflected in a number of *roman Medan*, such as in Emnast's *Medan Diwaktoe Malam* (1940) and A. Damhoeri's *Zender NIROM* (1940). Several other *roman Medan* depict the love stories of young lovers and love affairs between men and women that could have been a reflection of the contemporary social life of Medan.

## THE *ROMAN MEDAN* SERIES

There are dozens novels in the *Roman Medan* series. Six series have already been identified, as follows:

No.	Series	Publication Date
1	<i>Doenia Pengalaman</i>	1938
2	<i>Loekisan Poedjangga</i>	1939 <sup>6</sup>
3	<i>Tjendrawasih</i>	1940
4	<i>Suasana Baru</i>	1948
5	<i>Gelora</i>	1955
5	<i>Menara</i>	5 June 1960

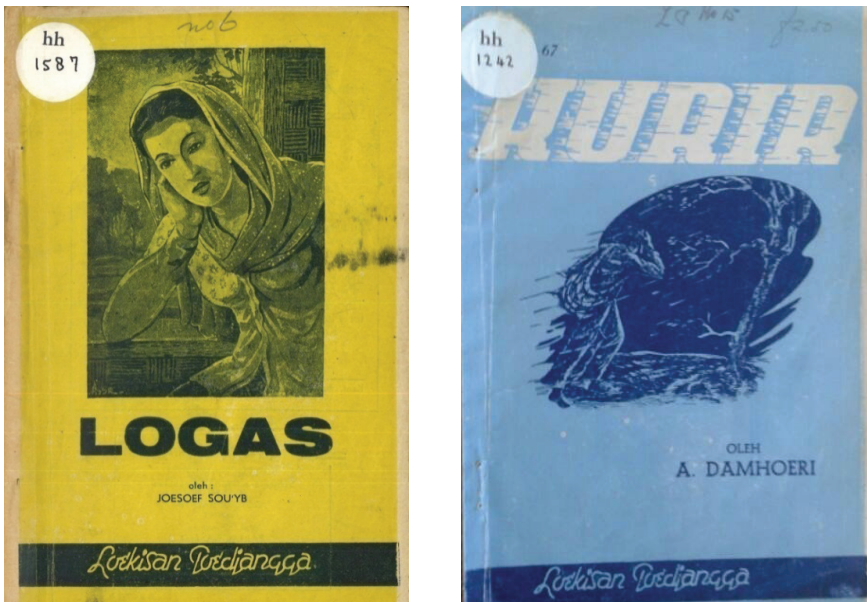
The *Doenia Pengalaman* (Figure 2) series that advertised itself as “*Doenia Pengalaman: Madjallah Roman–Detective Popoeler*” first began to appear in 1938. The address of the publisher was given as Hakkastraat



**Figure 2** Two editions of the *Doenia Pengalaman* series: *Elba* by S. Djarens (Year Three, No. 1, 1940) and *Dr. Chung* by S. Oesmany (Year Three, No. 13, 1940).

43, Medan. The series was established by Qasim Ahmad (Director), Qanoen, Matu Mona, S. Jarens, Emnast and Aria Dinatingrat (Editorial Board), A.M. Pamoentjak and M. Joenoes Amin (Administrators), A. Siregar and Joesoef Hoesin (Illustrators/Technical Staff) and Awis Kasim and A.R. Bendang (Marketing/Propagandists). The publisher of this series also published the illustrated magazine *Poernama* (or *Puranama*), which was established by M.S. Oemar (Director), A. Wahab Sr. and Si Oema (Editors) and Joesoef Hoesin (Illustrator). The publisher of the *Doenia Pengalaman* series was Penerbit Poestaka Islam,<sup>7</sup> which also published Islamic-themed books and magazines.

The *Loekisan Poedjangga* series (Figure 3) first appeared in 1939 and was established by Nawibt and friends (Figure 4). This series was published once a month by Penerbit Tjerdas in Medan and Tebing Tinggi. In Medan, Penerbit Tjerdas, which also owned its own *boekhandel* (bookshop), was located at Kapiteinsweg 21. Several editions of the *Loekisan Poedjangga* series were published by Penerbit & Boekhandel Penyiaran in Sigli and Langsa. This series appeared to have been published twice, first in 1939



**Figure 3** Two editions of the *Loekisan Poedjangga* series: *Logas* by Joesoef Sou'yb (No. 58, Year Six, April 1949) and *Kurir* by A. Damhoeri (No. 67, Year Seven, February 1950)





**Figure 4** The staff of Penerbit Tjerdas, the publisher of the *Loekisan Poedjangga* series. (Source: Zaidan, 1948, p. vi).

and then in 1944, when a new series with the same name appeared. This can be seen from the numbering of the series that accompanied every edition. Whether or not the second appearance of the *Loekisan Poedjangga* series (1944) is connected to Joesoef Sou’yb from the group that established the first series after its first three years is unclear. He became the Editor-in-Chief of *Loekisan Poedjangga* from 1939 to 1942. If taking into consideration its second appearance, then *Loekisan Poedjangga* is the most long-running series compared to the others.

The *Tjendrawasih* series (Figure 5) first began to appear in early 1940. The first numbered edition was by Matu Mona, entitled *T. Hoofdred Bertindak*, followed by *Spionnage di Azia Timoer* by Has[s]an Noel Arifin (A. Damhoeri 1940, inner cover). This series was developed by Oedin (Publisher), Matu Mona (Editor-in-Chief) and Djamaloeddin (Administrator) and was published by Penerbit Tjendrawasih whose address was Luitenantweg 20, Medan (A. Damhoeri, *ibid.*). Not much information can be gleaned about this series. It appears that the series did not have longevity and extant editions are hard to come by.



**Figure 5** An edition of the *Tjendrawasih* series, No. 7, Year One, 15 May 1940: *Zender NIROM* by A. Damhoeri.

The *Suasana Baru* series (Figure 7) first appeared in 1948. The address of its headquarters was “Djalan Sutomo 103 – Medan”. It was published twice a month and went through several printers, such as Sjarikat Tapanuli and Saiful. Its Editor-in-Chief was A.M. Karim, while its administration was led by A. Anwar Rawy.

The *Suasana Baru* series also had representatives in Malaya (known as *pembantu* [assistants] and *ejen* [agents]). In Indonesia, these representatives were located in Kalimantan (Borneo) and “N.I.T” (*Negara Indonesia Timur*, i.e. Sulawesi). Figure 6 immortalizes a gathering of the editorial team and its assistants and agents on the occasion of the second anniversary of *Suasana Baru* held in Medan in June 1949 (M. Sjaraf, 1949, p. 3).

The *Gelora* series (Figure 7) first began to appear in April 1955, upon the publication of its first edition titled *Angan2 dan Peristiwa* by Narmin



**Figure 6** A gathering of the editorial team of *Suasana Baru* and its representatives that took place in June 1949 in Medan.

(Source: M. Sjafar, 1949, p. 3).

Suti (1955). Its Editor-in-Chief was Narmin Suti and the Editorial Board consisted of Esdamha and Saiful U.A. (Medan), who were assisted by Bahrum Rangkuti (Jakarta), Amin Djaya and Abu Zaky (Singapore) and Maisir Thaib (Bukittinggi). The administration was led by Mochtar. The *Gelora* series was published once a month. Its headquarters was located at Jalan Kapten 46, Medan. This series was published by Penerbit Saiful, Medan (Narmin, 1955, p. 1). Not a lot of information has been discovered about this series because not many of its numbered editions have been located in the major libraries of the world. Very possibly, this series was a predecessor to the *Menara* series that was published only five years later.

The *Menara* series (Figure 7) first began to appear on 5 June, 1960 and lasted for over eight years. It appears that *Menara* is the last and youngest series of *roman Medan*. This series was managed by Saiful U.A. (Editor-in-Chief) and Sabaruddin Ahmad, B.A., Firaysma, Narmin Suti and Jamalul



**Figure 7** Examples of editions of the *Suasana Baru* series: *Arus bergolak* by M. Anwar Rawy (No. 37, Year Two, November 1949) (left), the *Gelora* series: *Angan2 dan Peristiwa* by Narmin Suti (No. 1, Year One, 1955) (middle) and the *Menara* series: *Santeri Muda dan Penari* by Saiful U.A. (1966, edition number not stated) (right).

Abidin ASS (Editorial Board). Its headquarters was based at Jalan Nilam 13 (Tel. 22384), Medan. The *Menara* series was published by Penerbit Saiful, which is owned by Saiful U.A., at Jalan Kapten 46, Medan.

Not all titles of the popular novels that were published in Medan are recorded in these six series. As far as can be traced, the first title published was *Dokter Sjamsoe*, a work by the journalist and writer, Hassan Noel Arifin (1928). Another early work was *Harta Terpendam* (1931) by Matu Mona, which was published before the appearance of *M. Joessjah Journalist* (1932) by the same writer, followed by his well-known work, *Rol Pacar Merah Indonesia cs* (1934).

## FORMAT

*Roman Medan* were published in pocketbook format, with a total of about 80 to 100 pages. Each title has a serial number, publication date and year of publication. On the whole, each numbered edition has one title, though there are some that have more than one. This was due to “*halangan jang menimpa dengan tidak disangka-sangka*” [“unexpected obstacles”], which resulted in some titles being released later than their scheduled date. Among the reasons given were shortages of paper, breakdowns of printing machines and editorial problems. There are also instances when two numbered editions were combined in one title.

The cover, which was usually in colour, featured a sketch done by the illustrator (see elaboration below). Many numbered editions were also enriched with illustrations that were meant to elucidate the message of the text for the readers. The style of the cover and text illustrations is generally realistic.

The first and last pages of each numbered edition contain various items of information that are of value to researchers, such as the titles in the next numbered editions of the series, brief summaries of the stories (as a form of promotional tactic), an editorial note concerning subscription, information about the writer, related editorial matters and advertisements of books and magazines from the same publisher or even other publishers. For example, the editors of the *Suasana Baru* series charged a fee of 50 gulden for a full-page advertisement and 25 gulden for a half-page one (Djaafar, 1948, inner cover).

## AUTHORS

The authors of *roman Medan* came from different areas, ethnic groups and religious backgrounds. This variety in the background of the authors of *roman Medan* was like an indirect union of the multi-ethnic Indonesians in opposition to the domination of the “centre of excellence” of Batavia (the colonial power), which controlled everything, including art tastes and cultural values.

From the first and final pages of many numbered editions, it can be gleaned that the authors of *roman Medan* came from Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Bali and Sulawesi. For example, D. Kusuma (Figure 8), who contributed some titles/numbered editions such as *Korban Perasaan* (*Suasana Baru* serie, 1949), *Penginapan didjalan Sunji* (*Suasana Baru* serie, 1949) and *Angin Selatan* (*Menara* serie, 1963), was Javanese.<sup>8</sup> M. Dimiyati was also a Javanese from Solo. Merayu Sukma (whose real name was Sulaiman Hassan; Figure 12) was a prolific author who came from Kalimantan (Sainul, 2014, p. 2).<sup>9</sup> He also wrote for the *Roman Pergaoelan* series that was published in Fort de Kock/Bukittinggi (Sudarmoko, 2008). Narmin Suti also came from Kalimantan (he may have been of Banjar-Malay origin). Taulu H.M. was from Minahasa (Tomohon) in North Sulawesi. I Made Otar was Balinese. It is mentioned that he wrote *Poernamawati* for the *Loekisan Poedjangga* series (1940) but no extant copy could be obtained. His fellow author, Putu Shanti (who was also an agent for the *Suasana Baru* series), was also from Bali and lived in

Singaraja (S.M. Taufik, 1949, inner cover). He was one of the authors from LEKRA who was left-wing (I Nyoman, 2008).

The most prominent of these authors were from the Minangkabau ethnic group, such as Hamka, Joesoef Sou'yb (Atisah, 2010), S. Djarens, Taher Samad, A. Damhoeri (Atisah, 1995; Suryadi, 2017a) and Saiful U.A. After this came authors from Tapanuli, such as D.I. Loebis, Matu Mona (see Suryadi, 2017b), Alinoedin Loebis and H.M. Hanafiah Lubis (Mahal's). Many of them briefly migrated to Medan or made this city their domicile.

***Roman Medan authors who have been successfully identified***

A.A. Musa, Abu Zul, Abwart Satyaputra, A. Anwar Rawy, Abdoelxarim [Abdoe'lxarim] M.s., Abdul Latif, Achmad Noer, A. Damhoeri [Damhuri], A.D.Chandu, A. Fuad Said, A. Hasjmy, Alinoedin Loebis, Ahmad Rifa'i Ali, Aria Diningrat [A. Damhoeri], Arsul Tumenggung, A. Samad. Asmara Suchi, Awem, Bachtiar Yunus, Bahrum Us, Badaruzzaman, B.D. 'Onczy, Biner, Dali Moetiara, Dalimin, D.E. Manu Turie [Manoe Toerie], Dena Ardansa, Dhalika Thadaus, D.I. Loebis, Djaafar [Tamin], Dja Hurlang, Djamaloeddin, Djauhari Kelana, D. Kusuma, Emnast, Hasyma A.S., Hazairin, H.D. Mariono, I. Made Otar, Imans, Imran Nast, Ismail Gafoery, J'Niah JS, Hamka, Has[s]an N[oel] Arifin, H.M. Taulu, Idrus, Joesoef Sou'yb [sou'ib], Imam Soepardi, Inangda, Karim Halim, L.M. Isa, Matu Mona [Matumona] (Hasboellah Parindurie), Mahal's (A.M. Hanafiah Lubis), M.A. Hastati, M.A. Rasjid Hilmy, M. Din, Merayu Sukma [M. Sulaiman Hassan], M.N. Sulan, Mochtar Nasoetion, M.[oehamad] Dimiyati, Mohamad Amin, M. Sjafar, Murni Ningsih, Musanissedarpi, Musra Sjahboeddin, Narmin Suti, Noer Lela Hajati, P[utu] Shanty, Raihul Amar, Rapez, Remadja, Sahiboel Hikajat, Saiful U.A., Santry R., S. Djarens, Shafar Jasin, Si Oema (A. Muis), S. Marulah, S.M. Taufik, Soeman Hs., S. O[e]smany, Supomo, Surapati [Surapaty] (M. Saleh Umar). Swan Pen, Synoe, Taher Samad, Tamar Djaja, Taulu H.M., Tjandra Kirana, Thomas, Yusdja, Zahakir Harris, Zalecha (Maharani), Z. Jusuff

Some of these authors used pen names or pseudonyms. "Aria Diningrat", "Swan Pen", "Merayu Sukma", "Si Oema", "Djauhari Kelana", "Surapati", "Asmara Suchi", "Zalecha" and "Rapez" are pen names. The real names of these authors could not yet be ascertained. At the time, authors used pen names for various reasons, not least for the two following main reasons.

Firstly, it was to avoid prosecution by the colonial administrators of the Dutch East Indies under laws that curbed press freedom because many of these authors were also journalists and extremely critical of the Dutch. Adi Negoro (1930) stated that at the time “*seorang wartawan jangan hendaknya menjadi wartawan thok, tapi mesti menjadi pengarang juga*” [“a journalist should not merely be a journalist but also a writer”]. Hamka, Emnast, Joesoef Sou’yb and Tamar Djaja were authors who were also great journalists in their time.

Secondly, during this time, when people still had misgivings about criticizing others, literary works allowed veiled social and political criticism. Therefore, those who were critical tried to conceal themselves behind pseudonyms because, at times, they criticized their own friends or colleagues. However, it was often possible to discern the identity of the person behind the pen name by looking at the writing style. Hamka once used the pen name Indera-Maha but was found out by a reader named Abdullatif (Zainal, 1951, p. 3).



**Figure 8** Photos of nine writers of *roman Medan*. Top (left to right): A. Damhoeri, Joesoef Sou’yb, Merayu Sukma, Emnast and Sjaiful U.A. Bottom (from left to right): D. Kusuma, Tamar Djaja, Hamka and Matu Mona. Sources (according to the order above): Suryadi (2011, p. 139); Joesoef (1979, back cover); *Penuntun* magazine, No. 2-3, Year Five, Febr./Mar 1951, p. 55; Emnast (1963, p. 3); Sjaiful (1968, p. 1); D. Kusuma (1980, back cover); *Aliran Islam: Suara Kaum Progresif Berhaluan Radikal* magazine, No. 46, Year Seven, Mar 1953, p.45; *Aliran Islam: Suara Kaum Progresif Berhaluan Radikal* magazine, No. 52, Year Seven, Aug 1953 [Madiun Affair Number], p. 60; Rita Matu Mona (personal communication, 15-03-2015).

## PUBLISHERS AND PRINTERS

*Roman Medan* were published and printed by local publishers such as Tjerdas, Poestaka Islam, Poestaka Alhambra, Penerbit Sjaiful, Zamrud, Antara, Medan Centrale Courant & Boekhandel, Sjarikat Tapanoeli, Tjermin Hidoep, Pustaka Nasional, Pustaka Andalas and National Book Store. The printers were not responsible for the content. There was also another publisher and bookstore, Boet Singh, which appears to have been owned by Indian immigrants. Several publishers also owned their own *boekhandel* (bookstore) and were printers as well, such as Tjerdas (which had branches in Bukittinggi and Jakarta) and Poestaka Islam. At the time, publishing in the vernacular language flourished in Medan. Publishers such as Poestaka Islam and Tjerdas also published other books apart from *roman Medan* (the *Loekisan Poedjangga* series).

Printing involved *ahli gambar* or *staf tekenaar* (illustrators). This can be discerned from the fact that their names were always included in the list of editorial staff of a *roman Medan* series. Their job was to prepare the cover and text illustrations for the novels to be published. The illustrators for *roman Medan* that have already been identified are: Ahmad Siregar, Bahzar, Djas, Joesoef Hoesein, J[usuf] Said, Luthfi and Zay. More research into the roles and positions of these *staf tekenaar* in the creation of *roman Medan*, or literary texts in the past in general, is necessary, and a cross-disciplinary study, such as researching fine arts and literature, would be interesting.

The actual dynamic of the publishing world in Medan between the 1920s and 1960s still needs more elucidation. The competition and business cooperation between them, their relationship with the government, availability of paper and printing presses and their membership in the Ikatan Penerbit Indonesia (IKAPI)<sup>10</sup> (M. Hoetaoeroek SH *et al.*, 1965) are some matters that remain unclear. The publisher of the *Gelora* series had an agent in Singapore (Saiful, 1968, p. 1). Therefore, more research into the publishing world in Medan is necessary to obtain a comprehensive picture of the local reading culture and publishing industry of this city, which indeed had a wide-ranging socio-cultural and political impact on the population of Sumatra and of Indonesia in general.

In general, the issues that affected the local publishers in Medan (and often those in other cities as well) was the shortage of paper supply, which would drive the price up sharply at times, or delays by subscribers or buyers of publications (books, magazines and newspapers) to “*mengirimkan*



wesel” [“send money orders”] (for the payment of books ordered). This last matter was often mentioned in the opening or closing pages of a *roman Medan*. It means that the survival of the vernacular publishers at the time depended very much on its consumers.

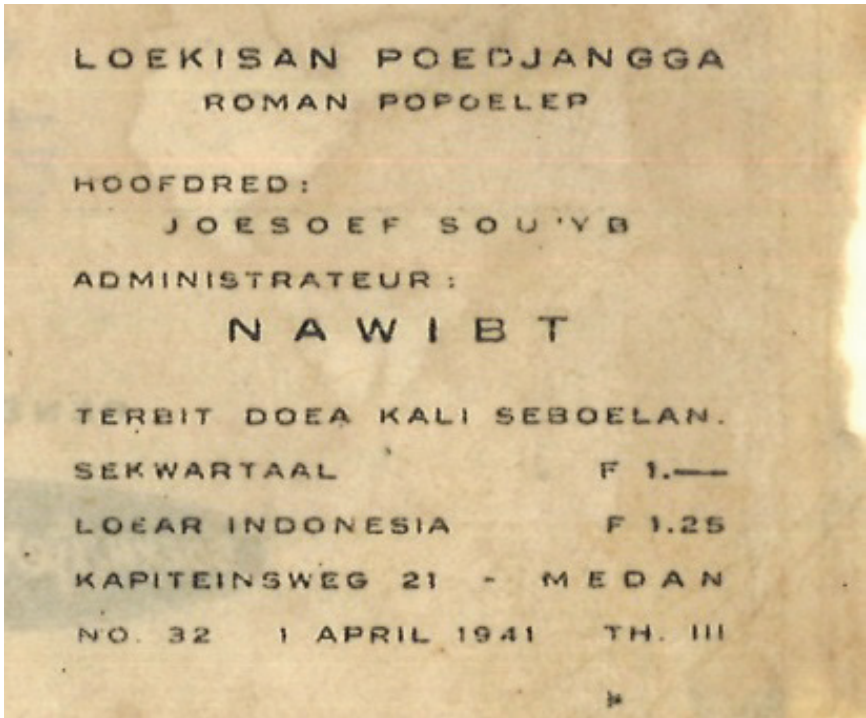
The exact print runs of these series has not yet been determined but many numbered editions were reprinted, with many said to have been sold out. According to Atisah (2010, back cover), almost 6000 copies of the *Doenia Pengalaman* series were in circulation. This is surely a high number for that time.

## DISTRIBUTION AND MARKETING

*Roman Medan* were distributed within and outside the Dutch East Indies (the term “Indonesia” was already in use; see Figure 9, Source: Joesoef, 1941, p. 2). The areas considered “loear Indonesia” [“outside Indonesia”] referred to The Straits Settlements or the British East Indies (Saiful, 1968, p. 96).

The distribution of *roman Medan* was carried out by placing sales agents in a number of cities in Sumatra, Java, Kalimantan, Bali and Sulawesi. The publishers of *roman Medan* aggressively recruited sales agents in various areas. These agents had various occupations: some were civil servants, owners of bookshop or other shops as well as owners of restaurants or cafeterias. These agents arranged and controlled the sales of the books ordered in their respective town/area. For example, the sales agents for the *Doenia Pengalaman* series were found in the towns of various provinces, regencies and districts. In Sumatra, these agents were found, among others, in Kotaraja, Tembilahan, Fort de Kock/Bukittinggi, Curup, Payakumbuh, Padang Sidempuan, Solok, Langsa, Maninjau, Bukittinggi, Binjai, Fort van de Capellen/Batusangkar, Medan, Tanjungpura, Pangkalan Brandan, Padang Panjang, Sungai Penuh, Sawahlunto, Padang, Cerenti, Pekanbaru, Pagaralam, Lahat, Dangung-dangung (Payakumbuh), Sibolga, Jambi, Silungkang and Kota Nopan. In Java, the agents for *Doenia Pengalaman* were located in Surabaya, Yogyakarta and Cirebon. In Kalimantan (Borneo), agents were located in Kandangan, Samarinda, Banjarmasin, Amuntai and Martapura (Joesoef Sou’ib, A. Damhoeri, and S. Djarens, 1938; A. Damhoeri, 1941, p. 73).

Apart from selling through agents, publishers also directly sent their books to individuals who had placed orders; these were usually regular subscribers and loyal readers of *roman Medan*. It can be seen from this



**Figure 9** The distribution of *roman Medan* also went as far as “loear Indonesia” [“outside Indonesia”]

(Source: Joesoef, 1941, p. 2)

that the distribution of *roman Medan* was carried out both intensively and extensively.

However, the distribution of *roman Medan* still ran into problems at times, among them being: (1) agents or individual subscribers sending payments late to the publishers in Medan, which doubtlessly affected the publisher’s finances; (2) orders not being delivered, either due to delays in the postal service or because the package was lost in the mail. For example, in Rapez’s *Tjempaka dari Madang* (*Suasana Baru* serie, No. 21, Year II, Early March 1949: [65]), the administrator/publisher included the following note:

*Berhubung dengan banjarknja surat2 jang datang kepada kami hampir tiap hari dari berbagai-bagai pelosok Indonesia, baik dari para langganan maupun agen2, jang menjatakan SB [Suasana Baru] kerap tidak diterimanja, maka dengan ini kami njatakan bahwa kami*

*tidak pernah lalai mengirimkan setiap nomor SB yang terbit dan kami mempunyai tjetetan tjetetan yang lengkap dalam hal ini.*

*Akan tetapi sungguh kami sesalkan, rupanja ditengah djalan tikus2 koran dan madjalah2 selalu memainkan peranannja, sehingga orang yang berhak untuk menerimanja merasa ketjewa karena perbuatan itu.*

*Ada djuga yang mengusulkan kepada kami, supaja pengiriman2 dilakukan dengan berdaftar (aangetekend), tetapi sungguh sajang karena di Medan waktu ini pengiriman berdaftar dibatasi, djadi kami tentu tak dapat mengabulkan permintaan itu.*

*Sudah barang tentu perbuatan yang seperti ini merugikan nama kami keluar, karena mungkin para langganan2 ataupun agen2 selalu berpendapat kami lalai mengirimkan pesanannja. Sedangkan yang sebenarnja kami tak pernah menahan tiap2 pesanan yang datang kepada kami, dengan sedapat daja kami urus dengan segera, karena kami djuga mengetahui untuk mendjaga nama kami keluar dan keptertjajaan agen2 dan para langganan2 kepada alamat kami.*

[Regarding the many letters that we receive every day from all parts of Indonesia, whether from our subscribers or our agents, saying that SB (*Suasana Baru*) was often not received, we would like to state here that we conscientiously send out every numbered edition of SB published, and we maintain complete records of this.

However, we regret that along the way the books are sometimes intercepted by scoundrels, to the detriment of the rightful receivers, who end up being disappointed because of such actions.

Some parties have suggested that we should use registered mail but unfortunately in Medan right now, there are restrictions on the registered mail in Medan. Therefore, we are unable to fulfil such requests.

Of course, such actions affect our reputation because subscribers or agents will think that we did not send out their orders, whereas, as far as possible, we fulfil all orders the moment we receive them, as we know that we must maintain our reputation and the trust of our agents and subscribers.]

Another example is a note on the inner cover of M. Din's *Notes Pembuka Rahasia* (1949):

*Diharap kepada langganan2 dan agen2 djikalau dalam tempo 15 hari SB [Suasana Baru, Suryadi] tidak ada diterima supaja memberikan kabar kepada kami, karena boleh djadi SB tersebut hilang didjalan,*

*dan dengan demikian dapat kami ganti dengan tjepat. Kami tidak pernah lalai mengirim SB jang tiap2 terbit dengan segera kepada para langganan2 dan agen2 dengan demikian supaja dimaklumi.*

[We hope that any subscribers or agents who do not receive SB [*Suasana Baru*] within 15 days to inform us because it is possible that the books get lost in transit and, in this way, we can send replacement copies quickly. Please be informed that we never neglect to send every edition of SB immediately to our subscribers and agents.]

Every publisher of *roman Medan* engaged the service of a staff member called a “propagandist”. The task of the propagandist was to recruit sales agents in various provinces. The propagandist was also responsible for channelling and distributing every numbered edition to the agents and to advertise, in various print media, published and forthcoming editions. Prices were prominently displayed. For example, the *Doenia Pengalaman* series cost 1 gulden for three months (later raised to 1.5 gulden) and each numbered edition cost 0.18 gulden. Outside Indonesia, the price was 1.75 gulden for three months and 0.20 gulden per numbered edition. The *Tjendrawasih* series cost 0.18 gulden per numbered edition and 1 gulden for three months (six numbered editions) (A. Damhoeri, 1940, inner cover). The *Suasana Baru* series retailed at 1.25 gulden for each numbered edition, while a three-month (quarterly) subscription cost 6.50 gulden (M. Sjafar, 1949, inner flap). The administration of the *Menara* series set the price for each of its numbered editions at 4 gulden, with an additional 10 percent charge for postage. However, in reality, for all kinds of reasons (usually because of the rising price of paper), the prices of the numbered editions of *roman Medan* were frequently raised.

To attract more readers, the administration of *roman Medan* used several tactics, such as quizzes, whereby readers who emerged as winners would win prizes. Apart from this, agents also received recognition or money from the publishers when they successfully sold more books.

## READERSHIP

The target readers of *roman Medan* were young people. To quote Joesoef Sou'yb: “*Seboeah roman berdjalinkan riwayat. Riwayat akan tinggal riwayat, fantasi akan tinggal fantasi. Disadjikan kepada para pemoeda dan pemoedi Indonesia.*” [“A novel spins a tale. The tale will remain a tale, fantasy will remain fantasy. Presented to Indonesia’s young men

and women.”] (Joesoef Sou’ib, A. Damhoeri, and S. Djarens, 1938, inner cover). The romance novel genre is certainly often linked to the free younger generation. However, there were writers who reminded that popular literature such as *roman Medan* should also have a moral and religious responsibility. Sjaiful UA (1968, pp. 95-6) said that popular novels, in this case he was referring to the *Menara* series, aimed at “*memelihara hubungan moral dan hubungan agama*” [“maintaining the moral and religious relationship”] that “*menjadi tanggung djawab kita bersama*” [“is our joint responsibility”]. He also stated (*ibid.*):

*Dewasa ini, tua-muda lebih banyak menggemari gambar2 porno jg merangsang nafsoe. Lebih suka batjaan jg menerbitkan selera seksualita dan merasa sjoor sendiri diratjun dengan Comic2 tjabul. Lebih senang melantai menari “a go go”, diguit2 dgn lagu2 top hit dari pada membatja buku2 jg berfaedah dan bermanfaat. Untuk mengatasi bertjabulnja kerusakan achlak dgn tidak membiarkan manusia kelapangan batjaan tjabul dengan porno Comic jg meluas sekarang ini, maka disebar-luaskan kembali “Menara” jg setiap terbit menghidangkan batjaan jg segar. Tendensius membina mental dgn menghidupkan spritualitas ORBA sampai dpt menindas habis moral moral bedjat ORLA. Tendensius “Menara”bersifat didaktis paedagogis, berseloka humoristis meringankan beban kehidupan dan penanaman religious berhubungan [dengan] Tuhan.*

[At this time, both old and young mostly prefer pornographic pictures that stirs their desires. They also prefer erotica, which arouses their sexual desire, and take wicked pleasure in lewd comics. They much prefer to dance the “a go go”, stirred by top hits, than to read something that is beneficial. To overcome the breakdown of moral values by not allowing people time to read the pornographic comics that have become widespread at this time, we once again bring back “Menara”, which offers fresh material with every edition. Tendentiousness builds a strong mentality by awakening the spirit of the New Order and defeating completely the moral depravity of the Old Order. “Menara” is didactic and pedagogic in nature, humorous and can help lighten the burdens of life as well as instil religiosity.]

Thus, Saiful U.A. was of the opinion that *roman Medan* were able to overcome the influence of obscene material that had become widespread in society (see Sutan Takdir *et al.*, 1957). The quote above also implies the victory of the New Order (Orde Baru, ORBA) and the accusations against

the Old Order (Orde Lama, ORLA) of Soekarno, whose adherents were considered to be morally depraved.

The morals of *roman Medan* were different from those of popular fiction nowadays. They incited feelings of nationalism and contained moral and religious lessons. Many editions also presented the history of Indonesians and the spirit of independence from the Dutch and Japanese, which was a smart way to inculcate an awareness of history and self-worth in the younger generation, the target readers of this corpus.

## POLITICAL AND LITERARY RESISTANCE AGAINST BATAVIA

Many of the writers of *roman Medan* had a nationalistic spirit and were anti-colonialists (Rieger, 1991, 2002; Horton, 2012; Koko, 2018). Their anti-colonialist feelings were couched in fiction. For example, *Logas*, *Paderi*, *Darah Perwira*, *Hoeloebalang Teukoe Oemar*, *Djiwa Pemuda*, *Kolonne Kelima* and *Di Empang Pengepoengan Kota Bondjol* all contained nationalistic messages and secret resistance via literary means against the Dutch colonial power (see Sri, 2011). As shown by Paul Tickel, early Indonesian popular literature (including the corpus of Indonesian-Chinese literature) was a means by which the “idea of Indonesian nationalist politics enter into the popular imagination” (Tickel, 2006, p. 27).

The political aspects of popular literature such as *roman Medan* can be traced through the fact that several editions were once confiscated by the colonial administration of the Dutch East Indies because they were considered to be disruptive to *rust en orde* (peace and order). A number of writers were also arrested and jailed by the PID (*Politieke Inlichtingen Dienst*, the colonial police force in the Dutch East Indies) because their writings were considered to be a danger to peace and order. One of those arrested was Matu Mona, who was jailed twice (in Medan and Bandung, where he was imprisoned in Sukamiskin prison) because of a press offence (*persdelict*) caused by his writings that were critical of the Dutch colonial administration. The combined *Suasana Baru* series 9/10 by A.A. Musa (1948), titled *Djiwa Pemuda*, were confiscated because its stories contained nationalistic elements whereby local youth should stand up against foreign colonialists (Asmara, 1948, p. 65).

During the Japanese occupation of Indonesia (1942-1945), *roman Medan* were also carefully reviewed (see the red letters in Figure 10: the inner cover of *Emnast Medan Diwaktoe Malam*). Many editions managed

to pass muster by the Japanese because the obvious criticism was against the Dutch. However, several *roman Medan*, such as the works by Zalecha, namely *Pemuda 4 Masa* (1949) and *Gadis 4 Zaman* (1949), contained criticism against the Japanese occupiers (Koko, 2017), to the extent that several numbered editions/titles were confiscated by the Japanese.

Many other interesting matters about the writers of *roman Medan* could be discussed further, such as the paradoxes of a writer from an Islamic background writing such novels (Jedamski, 2007). At a time of “bandjir roman” [“a flood of popular novels”], some people felt it was inappropriate and this was reflected in the polemics of the magazine *Pedoman Masyarakat*, which was under the leadership of Hamka and was one of the reading materials of intellectuals in Medan at the end of the colonial period. Some of the polemics were recorded in the books of Zainal Rasjid (1951<sup>11</sup>).



**Figure 10 A** red stamp with the wordings “SOEDAH DIPERIKSA OLEH BORNEO MINSEIBOE”, being the stamp of approval from the Japanese military authorities (in Kalimantan). (Source: Emnast, 1940, inner cover).

## ROMAN MEDAN/POPULAR NOVELS AND THE SPREAD OF LITERACY

From the above discussion about the readership of *roman Medan*, it can be discerned that the corpus of popular literature appealed to a different segment of readership than the books, magazines and almanacs published by Balai Poestaka. The readership of the works published by Balai Poestaka generally consisted of intellectuals who mostly belonged to the upper levels of local society. They were also closer to the white ruling class (the Dutch) because, on the whole, they had received a secular European/Dutch education and many of them worked in the *Netherlands East Indies Binnenlands Bestuur* (Dutch East Indies colonial administration). The other readers were students (pupils) of secular schools along the model of European/Dutch schools. Meanwhile, the readership of *roman Medan*, as explained above, consisted of young people or those who were older who, in terms of social class, were outside the first group mentioned earlier. They may have been exposed to the reading culture through education at public schools, which were labelled as “wild schools” by the Dutch. Based on the narrative contents of *roman Medan*, we can argue that the readership of this corpus (and of popular novels as a whole) had its own views regarding colonialism, which were opposite of those held by the readership of books published by Balai Poestaka.

The books published by Balai Poestaka were distributed throughout the Dutch East Indies using a mobile library system that was supported by *begroting* (funds) from the government. There were hundreds of automobiles that brought books by Balai Poestaka all over, for reading or borrowing, though this was restricted only to the major towns and cities, such as Palembang, Medan, Padang and the like. In several cities, branches of the Balai Poestaka libraries were established and managed by someone who was paid an honorarium by the government (see Balai Poestaka, 1930). *Roman Medan* reached a larger readership, even in areas inaccessible to the mobile libraries of Balai Poestaka. As explained earlier (see the explanation on distribution and marketing above), the distribution of *roman Medan* reached even small towns via local agents recruited by the publishers in Medan (see Figure 11).

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that *roman Medan* also spread the reading culture (literacy) in Indonesia, as was argued in the introduction of this article. The corpus of popular literature could reach a readership that had not, or not yet, been reached by Balai Poestaka (the



government). *Roman Medan* reached into far more levels of Indonesian society which meant, directly or indirectly, that it spread literacy among the locals and contributed to the intellectualization of the Indonesian people.

AGENT-AGENT „DOENIA PENGALAMAN“

- 1 Rahiman c/o „PERSIS“ — Poengai, Kota Radja.
- 2 Ishak, Gep. Onderwijzer — Kandangan, Borneo.
- 3 Datoek Radja Poetih, Pasar — Tembilahan.
- 4 Hamzah Djamil, Bioscoopstraat — Fort de Kock.
- 5 M. Choensan Ajjandi — P.G. 4 no. 48, S'nia.
- 6 Oesman Ahmad, „Toko Sepakat“ — Tjoeroep.
- 7 Jazid Nacor „Zocama' Moch.“ — Djokjakarta.
- 8 A. Ramid Iby, Gebr. Noer — Pajakoemboeh.
- 9 A.M. Thalib, Ag. „Pandj. Isl.“ — Samarinda.
- 10 M. Akiroen Has., Wilh. str. 171, P. Siampecan.
- 11 Harmaini Ahmad, Ag. „P. Isl.“ - K. Elau, Solok.
12. B. S. Amiroe'ddin, „Toko Medan“ — Langsa.
- 13 M. Joesoef Zaman — Kenarilaan, Tandj. Poera.
- 14 Soe'uib St. Telarangan — S. Batang, Manindjau.
- 15 Mohd. Jasin gar St. Bongsos — Talook.
- 16 M. Arsjad Bakri — Kp. Boegis no. 25, B'masin.
- 17 M. Kamil Abbas, Ag. „P. Isl.“ — Bindjei.
18. Dahlan Ibrahim, — Soemanik, F. v/d Capellen.
- 19 Anwar — Kapiteinsweg, MEDAN.
- 20 M. Thaher, Bibl: „International“ — MEDAN.
- 21 M. Hoesin — Pekingstraat, MEDAN.
- 22 Abd. Rahman — N. Pas. 29, P. Brandan.
- 23 Buffet Station D. S. M. — MEDAN.
- 24 St. Maaroef, Ag. „P. I.“, MANINDJAU.
- 25 Boekh. & Bibl. „Gotama“ — Padang Pandjang.
- 26 H.A. Bakar Darwisj — Pasar Solok.
- 27 M. Yassie, Djoean Tembaku - S. Penoeh.
- 28 M. Salim — Pasar Oesang, Sawah Loento.
- 29 Yamin Amin — Pasar Gadang, Padang.
- 30 H.M. Noer 'Ali — Tjeranti, Talook.
- 31 M. Zên gl. St. Maradjo, „Los. Baroe“ - P. Baroe.
- 32 Moeitjar, Ag. „Pandji Islam“ — Pagar Alam.
- 33 Mandah pa H.A. Halim, Wink. Koepiah - Lahat.
- 34 M. Tahir, Vollesonderw. — S. Roekam, Amoentai.
- 35 Djelinoes Yasin — Dangoeng 2, Pajakoemboeh.
- 36 BRH: „Fenj. Islqm“ - Kedjaksaan 119, Cheribon.
- 37 H.A. Moe'thi Oedjoedi Sr. Ag. „P. I.“ - Sibolga.
- 38 H.M. Ali Hamedh — Schoolst. no. 2, Djarubi.
- 39 Noerdin Mochammad, K. Moepak, Sibongkaang.
- 40 Armijn Loebis, Ag. „Pandji Islam“, Kota Nopan.
- 41 „National Bibliothek“ — Martapura, Borneo.

**Figure 11** Names and addresses of the agents of *Doenia Pengalaman*. They were not restricted to large cities but also to smaller towns and villages, such as Payakumbuh, Solok, Maninjau (West Sumatra), Pagar Alam, Lahat (South Sumatra), Kandangan and Amoentai (Borneo/Kalimantan), etc.

(Source: Joesoef Sou'ib, A. Damhoeri, and S. Djarens, 1938, p. 73).

## CONCLUSION

*Roman Medan* are a corpus of popular literature that once existed in Sumatra. Published once or twice monthly, this corpus, which was different from that of the Indonesian-Chinese writers, consisted of several series that published hundreds of editions in the pocketbook format, with a thickness of about 80 to 100 pages. These series—*Dunia Pengalaman*, *Loekisan Poedjangga*, *Tjendrawasih*, *Suasana Baru*, *Gelora* and *Menara*—were published alternately in a period that lasted about four decades (1930s to 1960s). The production team (writers, illustrators, publishers and printers), distributors and consumers of these *roman Medan* were all local Indonesians from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

*Roman Medan* were a part of urban popular culture. Their appearance and existence cannot be separated from the development of Medan at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The appearance of a corpus of popular literature was a part of the process of the spread of print literacy among the locals in the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) towards the end of the colonial period. Unlike those works that were considered “high literature”, *roman Medan* appealed to the general public. In this way, *roman Medan* helped to spread and increase literacy in the Latin script among the non-elite locals, overcoming the class boundaries that were so evident during colonial times.

*Roman Medan* were the result of a dynamic and developing world of local publishing in Indonesia that began in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The local publishers in Medan at the time even had branches in other towns and cities, such as Penerbit Tjerdas, which had branches in Sigli, Tebing Tinggi, Bukittinggi and even in Jakarta. Thus, at the time, Medan was an important centre or hub of vernacular publishing outside Java. Research on the vernacular publishing industry in Medan—the parties involved as well as its political and socio-cultural effects—should be carried out in greater depth via the research of Sudarmoko in West Sumatra (Sudarmoko, 2010). It will be interesting if research on these vernacular publishing houses in Medan is linked to the development of nationalism in Indonesia, such as the studies done by Ben Anderson (1991) and William R. Roff (1994) on earlier periods.

Intrinsically, although this has not been discussed in depth in this article, *roman Medan* had a literary spirit and contained narratives and morals that opposed the domination of the “centre of excellence” at Batavia, which was the centre of the colonial Dutch East Indies government

that tried evermore to control and monitor the local populace, whether economically, politically or culturally. *Roman Medan* were a corpus that brought together the local writers and intellectuals from various Indonesian islands, ethnic groups and religions, and this was surely one of the most significant contributions for instilling and increasing feelings of nationalism (*keindonesiaan*) at the time.

Sociological and structural research on *roman Medan* should be done across disciplines, involving literature, art, language and the like. The cataloguing of all *roman Medan* ever published should also be carried out. This will undoubtedly require hard work, diligence and funding because many of the editions are spread out in several libraries all over the world and in private collections; there may even be editions of which no extant copies exist anymore, which must then be traced through secondary sources.

As a part of the dynamic and development of popular culture of Indonesia, *roman Medan* must be investigated further in more detail. In this context, it would be very interesting to investigate how the ins and outs of the political scenario, the publishing world and artistic genres such as literature, painting, film, theatre, dance, music and recording, photography and the like, as well as intellectual movements, came into being in Medan in the early 1920s. Academic attention in these fields must be shifted from the tendency to only focus on the “centre of excellence” (Batavia) to the periphery, such as Medan and other towns outside Java.

## NOTES

1. An early version of this article was presented at the Seminar Nasional Budaya Populer organized by the Cultural Studies Faculty of the University of North Sumatra and the Cultural Values Conservation Centre, Banda Aceh (25 October 2017) (see Muhammad Takari and Arwina Sufika, 2017, pp. 230-268). I wish to thank the participants of this seminar for their comments, which helped in the improvement of this article, and the reviewers of *Malay Literature* for their valuable comments. Any errors or mistakes found in this article are entirely my own responsibility.
2. The corpus of *sastera Melayu Tionghoa* (Indonesian-Chinese Malay Literature) and *roman Medan* differ in terms of language, narrative, moral and audience.
3. Sudarmoko (2008). Regarding Roman Indonesia, a popular book series published in Padang in the 1930s and 1940s, see Suryadi (2010).
4. This article is found in the book *Bingkisan Budi* (editors: A.A. Cense *et al.*), a festschrift celebrating the 80th birthday of Prof. Ph.S. van Ronkel on 1 August 1950 (Leiden & Brussels: A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgeversmaatschappij N.V., 1950, pp. 255-64).
5. See also Horton's dissertation (2016) that discusses political aspects of popular novels published in Sumatra, especially in relation to World War II.

6. In 1944, another series appeared titled *Loekisan Poedjangga*, which was different from the one that had appeared in 1939.
7. In early 1949 (its sixth year), the *Doenia Pengalaman* series was established in Surabaya (address: Donokerto 2/50, Surabaya; this address was also listed as the boekhandel or bookshop belonging to Kasim Ahmad). *Pemimpin Umum* was still owned by Kasim Ahmad, who apparently moved from Medan to Surabaya. Its editorial team consisted of Mohd. Dimjati (Solo), Merayu Sukma (Malang; listed as head) and M. Dimjathie S.M., who also lived in Malang (Merayu Sukma, 1949, inside flap). This move could have been due to political reasons following the Second Dutch Military Agression, which brought about widespread chaos in Indonesia. At the time, Merayu Sukma, who was part of the backbone of this series, also migrated to Malang in eastern Java.
8. D. Kusuma (Djarnawi Hadikusuma) was born in Kauman, Yogyakarta, on 4 July 1920. He was an alumnus of Kweekschool Muhammadiyah, which later became Muallimin, in Yogyakarta. At one time, he joined the Law Faculty of Universitas Islam Indonesia at Yogyakarta and spent some three years in North Sumatra. Around the time of the Independence movement, he established and led the Barisan Pemuda Indonesia [Indonesian Youth Front]; at one time, he also joined the military police corps, serving in the Korps Polisi Tentara Resimen II Divisi X [Second Regiment of the Tenth Division] (D. Kusuma, 1980, back cover).
9. For more on Merayu Sukma, see Suryadi (2016). This writer passed away in Malang on 19 March 1951 (*Penuntun*, No. 2-3, Year V, February/March 1951, p. 55; the photo of Merayu Sukma is reproduced from this source). See also Sainul (2014), pp. 1-9.
10. It was recently discovered that Penerbit Saiful, who published the Menara series, was a member of IKAPI (Saiful, 1968, p. 95).
11. Hamka wrote the foreword and the conclusion of the the book, which contains five articles: “Angkatan baru” by Mohd. Dien Yatim; “Bandjir Roman” by H.S. Hamid; “Bandjir Roman” by Joesoef Sou’yb; “Memperkatakan Roman” by Tamar Djaja, “Memperkatakan Roman” by T.M. Oesman El Muhammadiyah and “Kata Penutup” by Hamka.

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