

Writing about Film Adaptation: Film Adaptation in Indonesian Media Discourse, 1927– 2011¹

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Abstract - This article examines how the practice of film adaptation, primarily the adaptation of novels into film, has been discussed in Indonesian media discourse since the first occurrences of the practice. As such, it applies a library research approach to review a range of literature related to adaptation produced between 1927 and 2011, including newspaper reviews, magazine reviews, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and academic articles. It finds that the practice of adapting novels to film has been recognised in reviews since at least the 1920s, but only in the 1950s did broader discourse emerge. Greater recognition, including in academia, emerged in the 1970s as the practice of adaptation became common in Indonesian cinema. Discussions of adaptation have tended to reflect dominant cultural ideologies and been undertaken from a literary perspective. However, there are signs that adaptation studies as a field may emerge in the near future.

Keywords - discourse, film adaptation, Indonesian cinema, media.

I. INTRODUCTION

The practice of adapting novels to film, often in the hopes of capitalising on existing audiences, has a lengthy history in Indonesia. In 1927, *Eulis Atjih*—the second film ever produced in the Indonesian archipelago—was released to audiences after being adapted from a Sundanese-language novel by Joehana. Over the decades since then, more than 250 films have been produced and released based on novels, including some of the most commercially successful films of the past ten years.² This prominence, however, has not coincided with widespread understanding of adaptation; unlike in the West, where adaptation studies have emerged as its own discipline, various aspects of the practice of adaptation have remained foreign for many Indonesians.

To better understand the state of Indonesian discourse on film adaptation, this article seeks to examine how it has been discussed in Indonesian media discourse since the first years of film adaptation. As such, it provides a review of a range of literature related to adaptation produced between 1927 and 2011, including newspaper reviews, magazine reviews, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and academic articles. Data, in the form of sentences and paragraphs, are collected from these publications to identify the tendencies in discourse regarding film adaptation and identify how these tendencies change over time. This is done by thematically categorising the data and then presenting them chronologically.

II. EARLY DISCOURSE: 1927–1970

Reviews of films in colonial Indonesian media are evident from the early 1920s. Some of the reviews published after 1926 deal with domestic adaptations of novels, and link the films with their source novels. For example, Kwee (1930) opens his review of *Si Tjonat* (1929) by discussing how popular the narrative was when published as a serial in the newspaper *Perniagaan*, thereby explicitly linking the film and its source material; he later compares the two, finding (for example) certain costumes unbefitting the characters. However, most of the reviews of film adaptations published during the colonial era either only mention the stories (rather than published media) or treat film adaptations similarly to non-adaptations. A review of *Dasima* (1941) in the *Soerabaijasch Handelsblad* ("Sampoerna: Dasima", 1941), for example, focuses on the talents of the actors and the technical quality of the film, as does a review of *Melati van Agam* ('Jasmine of Agam', 1941) in *De Sumatra Post* ("Deli Bioscoop: Melati van Agam", 1941); in this, these reviews resemble reviews of contemporary non-adaptations such as *Matula* ('Matula', 1941) ("Sampoerna: Matula", 1941) and *Ajah Berdosa* ('Sins of the Father', 1941) ("Sampoerna-theatre: Ajah Berdosa", 1942).

¹ This article is developed as part of the author's dissertation project, which examines the history of film adaptation in Indonesia. It is based on one sub-chapter of this dissertation, tentatively titled "Critical Reception from Film Critics".

² These include, for example, *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* ('Verses of Love', 2008), *Laskar Pelangi* ('Rainbow Troops', 2008), and *Dilan 1990* (2018), all of which sold more than three million tickets domestically.

Through the the 1950s, little recognition was given to the practice of adaptation when examples occurred. For example, in his review of *Pulang* ('Homecoming', 1952) in the magazine *Minggu Pagi*, Muntahar (1954: 19) mentions the author of the serial (and later novel) Toha Mohtar using the latter's penname, Badarijah M.P., but does not note the previous publication of the story. Rather, Muntahar focuses on rehashing the film's plot. Indeed, such lengthy summaries of reviewed films, sprinkled with commentary on aesthetic aspects, is standard for this period, and can be seen in reviews for films not based on novels such *Djandjiku Djandjimu* ('My Promise, Your Promise', 1954) by Ali Usman Said (1954), *Bintang Baru* by an unidentified staff writer ("Produksi Persari: Bintang Baru", 1954), and *Pegawai Tinggi* ('High Officeholder', 1955) by Sj. D. (1955).

Nonetheless, it is during this period that cultural critics began to seriously discuss the practice of adaptation. These writers, themselves authors and men of letters, did not attempt to use a systematic or scientific approach (contrast, for example, with Bluestone [1957]), but wrote for general audiences. Two examples, written by Ajip Rosidi and Asrul Sani respectively, are worth particular consideration.

The first article discussed, written by the literary critic and poet Ajip Rosidi in 1955,³ is a two-part article titled "Tentang Sastra dan Tjeritera Film" ('On Literature and Film Stories'). This article, published in the popular magazine *Kentjana*, provides a general discussion of film adaptation before reviewing Djoko Lelono's adaptation of a "synopsis" (more properly, a treatment) by Pramoedya Ananta Toer.

In his first instalment, Rosidi mentioned a number of literary works that had already been adapted to film by that point, either "successfully" or "unsuccessfully" (using subjective measures of quality). His examples included five films based on Shakespearean plays (*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Julius Caesar*) as well as films adapted from W. Somerset Maugham's short story "Rain" (1921, adapted as *Miss Sadie Thompson*), Ernest Hemingway's novel *To Have and Have Not* (1937) and short story "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" (1936), Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel *Quo Vadis?* (1896), and Homer's epic *The Odyssey* (adapted as *Ulysses*).

Reading this list of titles, it is readily apparent that Rosidi ignored films based on works of popular fiction, such as *The Big Night* (based on Stanley Ellin's novel *Dreadful Summit*).⁴ Furthermore, he marginalised the practice of adaptation in Indonesia itself, focusing on adaptations produced in Hollywood and ignoring local adaptations such as *Pulang* (1952) and *Sukreni, Gadis Bali* ('The Rape of Sukreni', 1955). As he wrote:

Until now there has not been an awareness [of film as art] from many filmmakers in Indonesia. We do not see any efforts from them to film works of literature, and from the stories they select, we can judge them as lacking artistic accountability⁵ (Rossidhy, 1955a, 7, 32).

Rosidi does, however, acknowledge several Indonesian literary adaptations as having been announced but never realised. As with the Hollywood films he mentions, his selections belie a bias for "serious" literature: Utuy Tatang Sontani's stage drama *Bunga Rumah Makan* ('Flower of the Restaurant', 1948) and Priyono Pratikto's short story "Dua Manusia Sepanjang Bukit" ('Two People along the Hills'). Both source works were written by authors consecrated in their contemporary literary field and used media that were dominant among the literarily oriented (i.e. not novels).

Rosidi's focus on consecration continues in his second instalment, which spends most of its space discussing *Rindu Damai* ('Longing for Peace', 1955), a film by Djoko Lelono based on a treatment by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. Highlighting the Shakespearean films of Sir Laurence Olivier and Orson Welles as examples of good film adaptations, Rosidi condemns *Rindu Damai* as an abject failure. He writes that the film was so poorly done that:

I think the phrase 'story by an internationally-renowned writer' on the film's advertisements does nothing but besmirch the name of Pramoedya Ananta Toer, who can of course develop his characters further than this⁶ (Rossidhy, 1955b: 10)

³ Rosidi was credited in these articles as "A. Rossidhy", a credit line he also used in the poetry anthology *Ketemu Didjalan* ('Meeting on the Road', 1956).

⁴ This film was screened in Indonesia in 1953 ("Agenda"), meaning that Rosidi could feasibly have seen it or at least been aware of it.

⁵ Original: "hingga sekarang belum mendjadi suatu kesadaran bagi sebagian pengusaha film di Indonesia ini. Tidak ada kita lihat usaha mereka untuk memfilmkan suatu hasil sastra, dan dengan tjerita-tjerita jang djustru mereka pilih, bisalah agaknja kita menilai merkea (*sic*), dalam hal ini penilaian dari sudut seni jang djuga meminta pertanggung djawab."

Similar tendencies are apparent in a lengthier discussion of adaptation used by Asrul Sani to introduce the 1957 Symposium on Literature. In this article, serialised in *Siasat* magazine from December 1957 to January 1958, Sani—recognised by this point as both a poet and as a screenwriter—clearly contrasts literature and film. Although he concedes that the media share a use of stories as well as narrative elements such as characters, he rejects the idea of equating them. Reflecting (perhaps unknowingly) the distinctions emerging in contemporary academia in the West, he argues that film and literature differ both in their smallest unit of communication—camera angle/set-up for film, sentence for literature (Sani, 1984: 74)—as well as in the capabilities necessitated for their protection. In doing so, Sani positions literature as the "more correct" art and questioned the validity finding the position of literature in film.

This is seen early in the article, when Sani likens the discussion of literature's position in stage dramas, radio, and film to the discussion of President Soekarno's position in the constitutions of the Netherlands, China, and India (Sani, 1984: 68). In his implicit personification of literature as the Indonesian president, most correctly seen as holding a position in the Indonesian constitution, Sani thus implies that literature is best seen qua literature, rather than as intersecting with other creative media. Sani ultimately concludes that "the issue of literature's position in film is an insane issue"⁷ (Sani, 1984: 78), arguing

If literature did have a position in film, we would find some measure of equivalence between them. This means that a peak of literary achievement would lead to a peak of filmic achievement. ... this is not how things are⁸ (Sani, 1984: 79).

To prove his argument, Sani—as with Rosidi—references consecrated works of literature. He cites, for example, an unspecified adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Black Cat"⁹ as lacking the same emotional release as its source material. Likewise, he holds that several other adaptations, such as John Huston's 1951 adaptation of Stephen Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) and King Vidor's 1956 adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1869), were incapable of reaching the same peaks as their (consecrated) source novels.

From this discussion, it is evident that discourse in 1950s and 1960s Indonesia marginalised the practice of film adaptation. First, implicit definitions limited the act of adaptation—or, at least, literary adaptation—to filmic adaptations of works in the literary canon, thereby emphasising the importance of *belles lettres* despite the fact that most film adaptations are based on popular fiction. Such discourse, by focusing on filmic adaptations of consecrated works of Western literature, negate contemporary adaptations of Indonesian novels; after all, in this discursive definition no "true" adaptation could exist if films were only adapted from works that were not "true" literature. This was reinforced by writers either arguing that Indonesian filmmakers were ignoring works of literary merit, as with Rosidi, or by completely omitting discussion of the practice of film adaptation in Indonesia, as with Sani. Implicitly, "true" adaptations (i.e. adaptations of consecrated works of literature) were made only in the West; such an orientation is not surprising, given the tendency of modernisation at the time to look continuously to Western culture.

Second, discourse held that film adaptations intrinsically lacked the same value as their literary counterparts, thereby implying that adaptations of novels or other literary works could never have the same merits as the work adapted. Rosidi, for example, identified several adaptations as falling short of their source stories; this was clearest in his discussion of *Rindu Damai* (1955), which he condemned for most of his article's second instalment. Sani, meanwhile, focused on an adaptation of "The Black Cat", contrasting the "beauty" of Poe's prose with the banal depiction of "no more than the hanging of a cat from a limb"¹⁰ in the film. The discourse these writers created positioned adaptation as being unable to compete, or even downright incompatible, with literature. Though films may function as films, they wrote, they were not literature.

III. RISING ACADEMIC AND POPULAR DISCOURSE: REVIEWING FILM ADAPTATIONS, 1970–1999

The connection of film adaptations to their source novels became more common in the 1970s as the practice of adaptation itself became more common. Some reviews did this in considerable detail; Said (1991a: 121–123), reviewing *Salah Asuhan* ('Never the Twain', 1972), for instance, argued that the film's director Asrul Sani had been faithful to Abdoel Moelis' novel, but ultimately failed in

⁶ Original: "Saja kira menuliskan kalimat 'kisah pengarang tokoh internasional' dalam reklame film itu, tjuma menodai nama Pramoedya Ananta Toer sadja, jang tentunja kemampuannya membangun tokoh²nja tidak tjuma sampai sekian."

⁷ Original: "Persoalan kedudukan sastra dalam film adalah suatu persoalan yang edan."

⁸ Original: "Jika kesusastraan mempunyai kedudukan dalam film, maka kita akan menemui semacam kesejajaran ukuran pada keduanya. Artinya suatu puncak yang tinggi dalam kesusastraan harusnya juga menghasilkan suatu puncak yang tinggi dalam film. ... tidaklah demikian adanya."

⁹ By 1957, two adaptations of "The Black Cat" had been released, one in 1934 and one in 1941.

¹⁰ Original: "Tidak lebih dari suatu penggantungan seekor kucing pada sebuah dahan".

film production as he was unable to create new conflict. Kristanto (1973: 5), discussing the same film, contrasted the settings of the novel and its adaptation before judging Sani as having succeeded. Reviewing *Kampus Biru*, Said (1991b: 166–167) blamed adaptation for introducing a plot hole, arguing that Ashadi Siregar's novel had resolved a problem regarding the main character's final examination that Ami Prijono left unanswered in the film. In discussing *Opera Jakarta*, meanwhile, Said (1991b: 185) noted that director Sjumandjaja intended to be "faithful" to this source work. Kristanto (1990: 10) introduced his review of *Taksi* by identifying its source material—a serial-turned novel by Eddy Suhendro—and describing the film as better at developing its plot and characters than the source work.

These reviews, and their willingness to implicitly position novels and film within the same media constellation, implies that a shift in understanding the practice of adaptation had occurred. This is further reflected in the article "Dari Novel ke Film: Yang Gagal dan yang Berhasil" ("From Novel to Film: Failures and Success"), written by the film reviewer Marselli Sumarno and published in the daily *Kompas* on 11 October 1981. Using fourteen examples of filmic adaptations of Indonesian novels released between 1976 and 1981,¹¹ as well as an adaptation of a journalistic report,¹² Marselli (1981) attempts to answer a series of questions about the success (or lack thereof) of film adaptations and their benefits for film production.

Before doing so, Marselli (1981) discusses the limits of and distinctions between novels and film. Although this article is not derived from an academic investigation of the act of film adaptation—even as it makes references to Western media critics and their theories—Marselli dedicates much space to the concept of adaptation itself. His understanding focuses primarily on novels' use of language and on films' use of visual media:

Novels make their expressions through the use of language, stringing together their stories with elements of plot, character, theme, etc. All of this is 'directed' by the author with all of his abilities. The peak of a novel's excellence is its ability to reveal hidden life, that which resides within the head of every human being. ... Meanwhile, film voices its expression through its user of imagery. Here is the peak of its excellence, making a portrait of filmic reality. Evaluation will always compare the material image and the true reality (Marselli, 1980).¹³

Drawing explicitly on the writings of Christian Metz (1974), but echoing to some extent the common perception that shots are the filmic equivalent of words (i.e. Kramsch, 1993: 192), Marselli expands his argument to state that

The material of a novel is limited by the availability of words, as many things cannot be painted through words. In film, that which seems to function as words is the shot. But a shot is not a word (Marselli, 1980).¹⁴

Marselli, reflecting a common view among audiences—and, indeed, authors and filmmakers—, focuses on the need for adaptations to remain faithful to the "soul" or "spirit" (*jiwa*) of the novel, to maintain the novel's central themes and messages and convey them visually:

True, it is difficult to avoid [the fact that], in the adaptation of a novel to film, many details will be lost. However, the soul of the book must be maintained. The quality of the film supports it, especially as related to important elements, such as casting (Marselli, 1980).¹⁵

¹¹ Specifically, *Karmila*, *Kampus Biru*, *Kugapai Cintamu*, *Terminal Cinta*, *Ali Topan Anak Jalanan*, *Badai Pasti Berlalu*, *Gita Cinta dari SMA*, *Mencari Cinta*, *Kabut Sutra Ungu*, *Puspa Indah Taman Hati*, *Kembang Padang Kelabu*, *Di Sini Cinta Pertama Kali Bersemi*, *Kemilau Kemuning Senja*, and *Jangan Ambil Nyawaku*. For comparison, a survey conducted as part of the author's dissertation project has identified 58 film adaptations as being released in the same five year period.

¹² Specifically, *Remang-Remang Jakarta* ('The Dim Alleys of Jakarta'), adapted from the journalistic report by Yuyu A.N. Krisna that was serialised in the newspaper *Sinar Harapan* before being published as *Menyusuri Remang-Remang Jakarta* ('Exploring the Dim Alleys of Jakarta') in 1979.

¹³ Original: Novel melontarkan ekspresinya lewat pengutaraan bahasa. Merangkaikan materi cerita dengan unsur-unsur plot, karakter, tema dan sebagainya. Semuanya ini 'diarahkan' oleh sang pengarang dengan segala kemampuannya. Puncak keunggulan dari novel ialah mampu mengungkapkan kehidupan tersembunyi, yang bersemayam di tiap kepala manusia. ... Sedangkan film mengutarakan ekspresinya lewat gambar. Di sinilah puncak keunggulannya, memotret realitas filmis. Penilaian akan selalau memperbandingkan antara materi gambar dan realitas yang sesungguhnya.

¹⁴ Original: Sedikit lagi, materi novel terbatas pada tersedianya kata, sebab banyak yang tak terlukiskan oleh kata-kata. Di film yang seolah-olah menjadi kata adalah shot. Tapi shot bukanlah sebuah kata.

After building this argument and mentioning examples of film adaptations, Marselli ponders the question of whether novels are appropriate sources for films. In this, he implicitly returns to the quality arguments used by Rosidi (1955a; 1955b) and Sani (1984); certain novels lack the quality necessary for film adaptation, and should therefore be ignored by filmmakers in favour of "quality" literature.

The conclusion is that, the literary realm with us today need not necessarily become the main source for making films, as many literary works are of little quality, in their themes or in their presentation, or even too difficult to be filmed. The literary realm opens a mental dialogue that reveals our understandings or concepts, and in the mind of every person a film is projected. The challenge for filmmakers is to not only find a good idea, but to process it to make a good film (Marselli, 1980).¹⁶

In the late 1970s, discussion of film adaptation also entered Indonesian academic discourse. This can be seen, for example, in a 1978 issue of the student literary magazine *Tifa Sastra*, where Pamusuk Eneste published an article titled "Ekranisasi: Kasus *Anak Perawan di Sarang Penyamun, Salah Asuhan, dan Atheis*" ('Ekranisasi: The Cases of *Anak Perawan di Sarang Penyamun, Salah Asuhan, and Atheis*'). In this article, a summary of Eneste's undergraduate thesis, he presents a short discussion of the additions, subtractions, and modifications that often occur in adaptation. As his examples, he used *Anak Perawan di Sarang Penyamun, Salah Asuhan, and Atheis*, and although he does not provide a detailed examination he does identify some changes to the novels' plots, such as Corrie moving to Bandung (rather than Semarang) after divorcing Hanafi in *Salah Asuhan*.

Based on his discussion, bibliography, and overall paradigm, it is clear that Eneste draws from Bluestone's book *Novels into Film*, although he does not explore theoretical aspects in as much detail as in his later book (published in 1991). As with Bluestone, he explicitly compares novel length to screenplay length, and indeed he references the screenplays of his case studies in his discussion. However, where Bluestone answers both the "what" and "why" of the narrative transformations that occur as part of the adaptation process, Eneste focuses only on the "what", presenting general findings similar to what any viewer with a passing familiarity with the source novels would recognise. For example:

In the screenplay for [*Anak Perawan di Sarang Penyamun*] the excises made from the novel by S. Takdir are clear. First, the past of Medasing (Chapter I). Second, the background of Samad (Chapter VI). Third, the life of Nyi Haji Andun after the murder of Hajji Sahak (Chapters VII, XVI, and XVII). Fourth, the homecoming of Medasing and Sayu to Pagar Alam (Chapter XV). Fifth, the time after Medasing's repentance (Chapter XVIII and XIX)

The most prominent addition in the screenplay [*Anak Perawan di Sarang Penyamun*] is the character Mawi. S. Takdir made no mention of a character named Mawi in his 112-page novel. This means that it was Usmar Ismail who added him to the screenplay. The presence of Mawi affects the story, plot, and characterisation in the entire [*Anak Perawan di Sarang Penyamun*] screenplay.¹⁷

¹⁵ Original: Memang sulit dihindarkan, dalam pengalihan novel ke buku [sic] akan banyak detil kejadian yang hilang. Namun jiwa buku harus tetap dipertahankan. Keunggulan film harus tetap menjagannya, apalagi yang menyangkut unsur penting, casting misalnya.

¹⁶ Original: Kesimpulannya ialah, dari dunia sastra yang ada pada kita tidak berarti dijadikan sumber utama penciptaan karya film, sebab banyak pula karya sastra yang tidak bermutu, baik tema maupun pengolahannya, atau malah terlalu sulit untuk difilmkan. Dunia sastra memang membuka dialog batin, yang mendedahkan kita dari pengertian atau konsepsi lisan, dan sebenarnya dari setiap kepala manusia terproyeksi suatu film. Ada unsur pembayangan mental. Tantangannya bagi pembuat film, jangan hanya berhenti menemukan ide yang baik, tapi garaplah menjadi film yang baik.

¹⁷ Original:
Dalam skenario APDSP kelihatan dengan jelas penciptaan halaman-halaman novel S. Takdir. Pertama, masa lalu Medasing (Bab I). Kedua, latar belakang Samad (Bab VI). Ketiga, kehidupan Nyi Haji Andun sejak terbunuhnya Haji Sahak (Bab VII, XVI, dan XVII). Keempat, kepulangan Medasing dan Sayu ke Pagar Alam (Bab XV). Kelima, masa sesudah pertobatan Medasing (Bab XVIII dan XIX).

Penambahan yang paling menyolok dalam skenario APDSP adalah munculnya tokoh Mawi. S. Takdir tidak menyebut-nyebut sama sekali tokoh Mawi dalam novelnya setebal 112 halaman itu. Berarti, Usmar Ismail-lah yang menambahkannya dalam skenario. Kehadiran Mawi ini ternyata mengakibatkan perubahan pada cerita, alur, maupun penokohan skenario APDSP secara keseluruhan.

As with Armijn Pane (1955a; 1955b) and Asrul Sani (1984), but unlike Marselli (1980), Eneste focuses on works in the literary canon that were adapted by highly regarded contemporary filmmakers—Usmar Ismail, Asrul Sani, and Sjumandjaja, respectively—, implying through this selection that discussion of adaptation must be limited to consecrated works of literature made by cineaste filmmakers. By doing so, he negates most adaptations of Indonesian novels to that point. As mentioned previously, most film adaptations in Indonesia have been based on works of popular literature, and adaptations based on works that later entered the national literary canon—for example, *Siti Noerbaja* (Lie Tek Swie, 1941); *Sukreni, Gadis Bali* (A.A. Pandji Tisna, 1955); and *Tanah Gersang* (Bugel Supardi, 1971)—have mostly been completed by filmmakers without recognition as "auteurs". One could infer from Eneste's selection that, in his view, no "true" adaptation could exist if the story filmed was not a "true" work of literature and if the filmmaker was not a "true" filmmaker. This represents a seemingly minor, but significant, departure from approaches taken during the 1950s and 1960s.

By the 1980s, at least one workshop had been held in Indonesia on the topic of film adaptation; featuring the American novelists Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne, it offered a practitioner's look at the practice of film adaptation in Hollywood ("Dari Novel ke Film", 1980). The following decade, Eneste published his baccalaureate thesis as a book. Titled *Novel dan Film*, it became a major point of reference for later examinations of adaptation in Indonesia; this was predicted in a 1991 *Kompas* review by Maman S. Mahayana, who wrote, "... overall this book has a special meaning in its positioning the question of *ekranisasi* from novel to film. ... The more Indonesian novels adapted to film, will not only make our cinema refer more to the people and environment of Indonesia, but also bring a greater passion to our literary (novel) circles and push authors to produce even better works."¹⁸

From this discussion, two main points may be drawn regarding the reviewing of film adaptations from the 1970s through the 1980s. First, in discussing the practice of adaptation, reviews published in popular media focused on the transformations that occurred to novels' texts when adapted to film, implying an understanding of adaptation as a process of textual transformation rather than as a process influencing the entire filmmaking process. Indeed, in these reviews, other elements of the adaptation process—the selection of works to be adapted, for example—received little discussion. This focus on adaptation as textual transformation has remained prominent in popular discourse and even in academic discourse.

Second, although there was some recognition of popular literature and its fertile use by filmmakers, film critics still tended to emphasise the value (and consecration) of the novel being adapted. The question of whether a novel was "good" enough to be adapted to film was given greater recognition than the question of whether it had broad enough audiences to find success. This illustrates how biases among the educated elites were perpetuated under the contemporary system.

IV. RECOGNISING FILM ADAPTATIONS, 2000–PRESENT

Since 2000, aspects of the adaptation process have continued to be discussed in critical reviews of films based on novels. As in the preceding era, the extent of focus on this topic has varied. For example, Pasaribu (2011a) titles his review of *Di Bawah Lindungan Ka'bah* ('Under the Protection of Ka'bah', 2011) "Membahasakan Ulang Atau Menafsir Ulang Novel?" ("Retelling or Reinterpreting Novels?"), putting the adaptation process central in his review, and ultimately dedicates several paragraphs to comparing the novel and film. Yazid (2008), likewise, begins his review of *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* ('Verses of Love', 2008) by mentioning the film's adaptation status; unlike Pasaribu, however, he makes no reference to textual transformations made during the process.

However, significant shifts occurred in contemporary popular examinations of the general practice of film adaptation. This can be seen in an article titled "Melayarkan Sastra: Sebuah Problem" ('Screening Literature: A Problem') published in *Tempo* magazine in 2011. In this article, the film scholar and film festival director Budi Irawanto offers an understanding of film adaptation that recognises—albeit implicitly—film directors' agency by emphasising interpretation. Although reasserted most strongly later ("the problem is one of different interpretations"¹⁹), this becomes apparent as early as the opening paragraph:

The late Fr. Y.B. Mangunwijaya felt perturbed when Ami Prijono, in 1982, made a film based on his novel, *Roro Mendut*. He was disappointed with Ami Prijono's interpretation of his novel. As a result, Fr. Mangun refused to include his name as the story's author. Far before this, Armijn Pane experienced disappointment when Dr Huyung filmed his

¹⁸ Original: Begitulah, secara keseluruhan buku ini punya arti khusus dalam mendudukkan persoalan ekranisasi novel-film. ... Makin banyak novel Indonesia yang diangkat ke dalam film, tidak hanya membuat dunia perfilman kita lebih berpijak pada masyarakat dan lingkungan Indonesia sendiri, tetapi juga dapat menggairahkan kehidupan dunia sastra (novel) kita serta mendorong pengarang untuk menghasilkan karya yang berkualitas lagi.

¹⁹ Original: soalnya terletak pada beda penafsiran.

work *Antara Bumi dan Langit* in 1950. Just like Fr. Mangun, Armijn refused to be credited as the story's writer. These two cases underscore the complexity of adapting a literary work to film (Irawanto, 2011).²⁰

Also evidenced in this opening quotation is greater historical awareness than previously. Where previous examinations of adaptation ignored contemporary practices (i.e. Rosidi, 1955a; 1955b) or credited adaptation as emerging in the 1960s (i.e. Eneste, 1977: 17), Irawanto recognises in this paragraph that the practice of film adaptation in Indonesia could be traced back into the 1950s. Despite a history of adaptation not being his focus, later in the article he mentions examples from the 1920s (*Njai Dasima* [1929], *Si Tjonat* [1929]) through the 1980s (*Karmila* [1974], *Jangan Ambil Nyawaku* ['Don't Take my Life', 1981], etc.) and up through the massive commercial successes of *Laskar Pelangi* ('Rainbow Troops', 2009) and *Ayat-Ayat Cinta* (2009).

As with Marselli (1981), Irawanto (2011) refers to a more conceptual understanding of literature and film. He turns to the positioning of cinema as an "impure art" by Alain Badiou (2005) to explain the medium's adaptability, and refers to film theorist Sergei Eisenstein and film directors Francois Truffaut and Akira Kurosawa to underscore the relationship between literature and cinema. He ultimately argues that, "unlike many argue, cinema is truly more similar to literature than drama",²¹ as a film will remain the same every time it is screened.

Irawanto, as with previous writers, recognises literature and film as different because of their media, noting not only that films tend to excise or abbreviate specific dialogues or scenes from the literary works they adapt but also that the adaptation process involves a transformation of words to visuals. As such, he argues—again returning to the question of interpretation—:

Transforming linguistic worlds into visual language, of course, is not as easy as flipping one's hand. It requires the capacity to transform literature into photographic imagery and spatial understandings following the rules of editing and montage. In other words, a skill in reinterpreting works of literature (Irawanto, 2011).²²

Based on this argument, Irawanto argues that adaptation is generally positive for film production, allowing filmmakers to improve the stories upon which they build their works.

Whatever its problems, literature clearly provides a wealth of raw material for cinema. And story, as we know, is the backbone of a film. Without a good story, it is pointless to hope for an enthralling film. ... [I]t is time for our cineastes to embrace literature ... so our cinema is not always snared in shallow stories and a dearth of themes (Irawanto, 2011).²³

Since the 2000s, or perhaps more specifically, since 2008, adaptation has gained an increasingly prominent space in academic discourse. It has been the subject of wide discussion in undergraduate theses, journal articles (Saputra, 2009; Afri, Nurizzati, and Nasution, 2014; Isnaniah, 2015), and books (Rokhmansyah, 2014); most writers have a background in literary studies, rather than film studies. Although many writers have followed the definitions and understandings of Eneste (1991), as his book *Novel dan Film* is by far the most accessible reference material in Indonesian, others have turned to outside theories and theorists to position adaptation within the constellation of Indonesian academia. However, discussion of film adaptation has yet to realise a shared lexicon; the practice itself, for example, has been variously known as *ekranisasi* (literally 'screenification', as in Eneste [1978], *alih wahana* ('media adaptation', as in Damono [2005]), *filmisasi* ('filmisation'), and *pelayarputihan* ('silver screen-ing', as in Rokhmansyah [2014]).

²⁰ Original: Mendiang Romo Y.B. Mangunwijaya pernah merasa masygul ketika Ami Prijono pada 1982 membuat film dari novelnya, Roro Mendut. Ia kecewa terhadap tafsir Ami Prijono atas novelnya. Akibatnya, Romo Mangun menampik namanya dicantumkan sebagai penulis cerita. Jauh sebelumnya, Armijn Pane menuai kekecewaan tatkala Dr Huyung memfilmkan karyanya, Antara Bumi dan Langit, pada 1950. Persis seperti Romo Mangun, Armijn menolak namanya disebut sebagai penulis cerita. Dua kasus ini sekadar mengguratkan peliknya mengadaptasi karya sastra ke film (Irawanto, 2011).

²¹ Original: Tak seperti sangkaan banyak orang, sinema sesungguhnya memiliki kesamaan dengan sastra ketimbang drama.

²² Original: Mengubah jagat kata ke dalam bahasa gambar tentu tak semudah membalik telapak tangan. Dibutuhkan kemampuan mentransformasi sastra ke dalam imaji fotografis dan gagasan keruangan berdasarkan kaidah penyuntingan atau montase. Dengan kata lain kecerdasan menafsir ulang karya sastra.

²³ Original: Apa pun soalnya, karya sastra jelas menyediakan bahan baku cerita yang kaya bagi sinema. Dan cerita, kita tahu, adalah tulang punggung sebuah film. Tanpa cerita yang baik, muskil berharap lahir film yang memukau. ... [S]udah saatnya sineas kita mengakrabi sastra ... agar sinema kita tak terus-menerus didera oleh kemiskinan tema dan kedangkalan cerita.

From this discussion, it may be concluded that, although reviewers continued to consider the transformations that occurred to novels' texts when adapted to film, they also evaluated adaptations as films. Furthermore, where adaptation had often been understood in an ahistorical manner, the history of the practice has begun to gain attention; indeed, Woodrich (2017) has even provided a history of the practice of adaptation in colonial Indonesia and is currently attempting to map the first eighty years of the practice.

This tendency is also reflected in academic studies of adaptation in Indonesia, which have become increasingly diverse and examined the practice from a variety of perspectives. These, however, remain dominated by literary approaches. Examinations of film adaptations by researchers with backgrounds in film studies are uncommon, and their lack of representation continues to shape contemporary discourse on adaptation studies.

V. CONCLUSION

The practice of adapting novels to film has been evident in Indonesia since at least the 1920s, as has direct comparison of novels with films adapted from them. However, broader discussion of the practice of film adaptation itself seems to have only emerged in the 1950s, and even then with a focus on the practice in the West. Indonesian examples of adaptation only gained the centre stage in broad discourse when the practice became more common in the late 1970s. Since then, an increasing number of writers in popular media have given the subject consideration. Likewise, academics have begun to investigate the practice of adaptation in Indonesia using a variety of perspectives, although no field of adaptation studies has emerged.

In discourse regarding adaptation, writers—both popular and academic—have tended to reflect the predominant biases of their time rather than contribute new perspectives. Rosidi and Sani, for example, reflected the bias against popular literature that dominated cultural discourse at the time; Eneste reflected the structuralist paradigms dominant in 1970s Indonesian academia; and Irawanto reflected the increased recognition of individual agency in academia. Although this may change over time, Indonesian discourse on adaptation has not been on the vanguard, but rather lagged behind Western discourse. At the same time, it has yet to demonstrate whether there are any uniquely Indonesian characteristics to the practice of adaptation in Indonesia.

Looking to the future, however, there is a glimmer of hope. Increased academic attention has been given to the subject of film adaptation, with Indonesian scholars studying abroad and discursively bringing their concepts back to the country. Meanwhile, a number of non-academic studies have been conducted to understand aspects of adaptation that are not limited to the text itself, indicating the beginnings of a broader understanding of the practice. Although there remain problems with adaptation being understood primarily from a literary perspective, this will be addressed as Indonesia opens new film study programmes that will offer an alternative means of understanding the practice of adaptation.

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