
The Position and Aesthetic Form of Indonesian Detective Fiction after the 1980s within the Landscape of Indonesian Literature

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ABSTRACT

After its golden age in the 1980s, Indonesian detective fiction experienced a period of decline during the 1990s. In the following decades, many young writers emerged with their own detective works. However, despite its long history, post-1980 Indonesian detective fiction has continued to receive limited scholarly attention. Its position within academic literary studies remains less prominent compared to other genres that are more frequently discussed in Indonesian literary discourse. This research addresses the problem of how Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s is positioned within the landscape of Indonesian literature, how the aesthetic forms and ideologies of detective works from each decade are manifested, and how post-1980 Indonesian detective fiction not only transforms in terms of form and position but also becomes a negotiation arena between social, political, and cultural discourses. The study employs a sociological approach to literature, by using Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field and Terry Eagleton's aesthetics of ideology, this study offers a novel perspective on how Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s negotiates market pressures, symbolic capital, and cultural discourse. The findings reveal that, after the 1980s, Indonesian detective fiction shifted from a semi-heteronomous to a semi-autonomous position within the literary field, as seen in the works of S. Mara Gd. (1990), E.S. Ito (2005), and Sabda Armandio (2014). Aesthetically and ideologically, the genre transformed from linear, moralistic narratives to experimental, metafictional, and reflective forms that critique power, history, and social values. Consequently, post-1980s Indonesian detective fiction functions as a negotiation arena where social, political, and cultural elements interact, turning popular entertainment into a medium of social critique.

Keywords: *aesthetic form; ideology; Indonesian detective fiction; literary field; negotiation arena*

INTRODUCTION

In the history of Indonesian literature, detective fiction began in the early 20th century with European-style detective stories filling the *feuilletons* (serial instalments) section of daily newspapers (Jedamski, 1995: 170). By the late 19th century, the Dutch East

Indies had started receiving substantial private investment, which brought advances in infrastructure, industrial development, and rapidly growing cities (Van De Water, 2018: 73). Urbanization surged, and with it came inequality. Colonial urban centers

began to be haunted by criminality and other social pathologies. The social structure, undermined by rapid growth, made middle and upper-class Europeans fearful of loss of property and person. Such anxieties fostered fertile ground for detective fiction in the Indies.

Detective fiction proliferated in Indonesia from about 1904, when *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur Conan Doyle began to appear in serial translation (feuilleton) to maintain newspaper readership. The *Koran Bintang Hindia* soon followed by publishing *A Study in Scarlet* in serial form. This phenomenon indicates that readership enthusiasm for detective stories had by then become well-established. About the same time came *Finally Revealed*, set in America, translated as *Baroe Ketahoewan* in a Sukabumi newspaper (Chandra, 2016: 44). Thus, between 1910 and the 1920s, other detective serials were frequently published without permission in daily newspapers in the Dutch East Indies.

Baroe Ketahoewan, which reveals the puzzles of a murder case, turns out to be a translated work adapted by a Peranakan Chinese writer with the initials Phoa Tjoen Hoay. He was known for translating Chinese detective novels; one of his well-known translations is *Souw Gan Tjiang atawan Pemboenoh Jang Samar* (1904) (Jedamski, 1995: 178). Earlier, the earliest Sino-Malay translation of Sherlock Holmes was by Houw San Liang into Malay, and it was very popular. Horton (2018) also identified a detective fiction work published in 1941 in Yogyakarta, which revolves around the mysterious murder of Moh. Hoesni Thamrin. The narrative features a Javanese detective named Raden Soebroto and a mysterious antagonist known as Patjar Koenig. Allegedly, *The Patjar Koenig Series*, consisting of eight serials, was inspired by political scandals of the time.

Detective fiction in that era was popular among readers not only to retain newspaper subscriptions but also as inspiration for local authors. Sources for local authors came from news reports and special crime columns in the press, since various felonies always made the news (Jedamski, 1995: 178). In the 1930s, native writers (Bumiputra) began contributing more to detective productions. Soeman Hs became a pioneer of the genre in Indonesia with his novel *Kasih Tak Terlarai*, followed by *Percobaan Setia* (1932), *Mencari Pencuri Anak Perawan* (1932), *Tebusan Darah* (1939), and the short story collection *Kawan Bergelut*

(1941), which is heavily marked by investigative narratives. Other names included Si Oema, Taher Samad, Surapati, A. Damhoeri, Yoesoef Sou'yb, and Matu Mona. Of course, they viewed the genre from their experience as the colonized.

In subsequent years, detective writers grew, such as Aryono Gandy, whose detective story *Naga Mas* appeared in a serial "cerbung" in *Terang Bulan* in 1952. Suparto Brata published the detective serial *Tanpa Tlatjak* in *Panjebar Semangat* in 1961. In the 1980s, detective fiction reached its zenith with authors like S. Mara Gd, known for works such as *Misteri Pembunuhan*, which emphasize plot and motive in determining criminal action. At the same time, translated works of Agatha Christie, noted for the detective's deductive ability, were also popular. Arswendo Atmowiloto contributed to the golden age via his serial *Imung*, published over 16 serials by Gramedia; *Imung* was adapted for television on SCTV in the 1990s, and previously published in *Hai* magazine. In 2014, the children's detective *Imung* was republished in four novels by Plotpoint.

The presence of Seno Gumira Ajidarma should also be acknowledged when discussing detective literature. While not always in a strict detective structure, his narratives often provoke readers to become investigators, constructing mystery-like plots. His short story "Pembunuhan", published in *Kompas* on 22 October 1978, is a layered detective tale steeped in political context. Furthermore, his comic *Sukab: Intel Melayu* (2002) also contains detective elements. These works illustrate how Indonesian authors have creatively appropriated detective conventions, embedding them within local socio-political realities. In doing so, Seno expands the boundaries of the genre beyond mere entertainment, transforming it into a vehicle of critique.

Recent studies on detective fiction in general have been extensively conducted by international scholars from various approaches (Clausson, 2023; Kanakaraj, 2018; Leinster, 2017; Medawar, 2019; Patrick A. McCarthy, 2017; Rush, 2024). Likewise, in Indonesia—alongside its long history—several studies on detective literature/fiction have also contributed to Indonesian literary scholarship. Earlier research shows that the structural patterns of Indonesian detective stories display unique features, particularly in terms of factual elements and narrative objectives (Hariyono, 1989; Horton, 2018), though

they remain largely influenced by Western traditions in terms of plot, characterization, and isolated settings (Sari & Merawati, 2025; Chandra, 2016; Istiqomah & Zustiyanoro, 2025; Sungkowati, 2014), as well as discourse-oriented studies (see Siregar, Sumaryoto, & Masrin, 2023). Most earlier studies on Indonesian detective fiction focus on works produced before 1980. While these studies offer valuable insights, their emphasis tends to fall more on textual analysis rather than on the broader sociological and ideological positioning of detective fiction within the Indonesian literary field.

This study focuses on three main research questions: first, how Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s is positioned within the landscape of Indonesian literature; second, how the aesthetic forms and ideologies of detective works from each decade are manifested; and third, how post-1980s Indonesian detective fiction not only transforms in terms of form and position but also functions as a negotiation arena of social, political, and cultural discourse. To address these questions, the study employs a sociological approach to literature, drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the literary field (1993) and Terry Eagleton's concept of aesthetics and ideology (1976).

The study analyzes data from three authors and their representative works, which mark the historical transformation and aesthetic as well as ideological development of Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s. They are S. Mara GD (1985), with *Misteri Dian yang Padam* (continued series published in the 1990s), representing the 1990s; E.S. Ito (2005) with *Negara Kelima*, representing the 2000s; and Sabda Armandio (2014), with *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar*, representing the 2010s. The position of post-1980s detective fiction is examined through Bourdieu's literary field framework by identifying types of capital (symbolic, cultural, economic, and social), degrees of autonomy and heteronomy in production and reception, relations among agents, and institutional and reader responses. The aesthetic forms and ideologies of these works are analyzed using Eagleton's concept of the aesthetics of production.

From Bourdieu's perspective (1993: 30), literature is produced within a field of cultural production, where authors, publishers, critics, and readers interact in a struggle for symbolic and economic capital. The position of Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s within the literary

landscape can thus be understood as the outcome of negotiations among market demands, cultural legitimacy, and symbolic recognition. At the same time, literary works are inseparable from ideology, functioning both as a reflection of and a participant in ideological practices (Eagleton, 1976: 16). Eagleton's framework helps explain how crime and investigative narratives in post-1980s Indonesian detective fiction operate as a space for negotiating cultural meanings and political discourses, while also reflecting the authors' critical awareness of social structures and dominant ideologies. Together, these two theoretical perspectives reveal not only the position, aesthetic forms, and ideologies of post-1980s detective fiction, but also its function as a negotiation space in which political and cultural discourses are articulated.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The Position of Indonesian Detective Fiction after the 1980s

The first section discusses how Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s is positioned within the landscape of Indonesian literature. A literary work or its author attains a certain position within the literary system based on the types of capital possessed—symbolic, cultural, economic, or social—the degree of autonomy and heteronomy in its production and reception, the relationships among agents, and the institutional and readerly responses (Bourdieu, 1993: 37). This position is dynamic, as it is continually shaped by the tension between market forces and cultural legitimacy, which together form the “literary field” as a space of symbolic struggle. Thus, understanding the position of Indonesian detective fiction also means examining how this genre negotiates its place within the structure of symbolic power in the national literary system.

Although there are no specific records, several sources suggest that the 1980s marked the golden age of Indonesian detective fiction (Firdausi, 2018). This period shows a significant phase of growth. S. Mara Gd. became a key figure in the history of that era's development (Fauziyah, 2015). He began with his first novel, *Misteri Dian yang Padam* (*The Mystery of the Extinguished Lamp*), in 1984. Prior to that, he had translated numerous detective stories by Agatha Christie. In early 1985, the novel became a bestseller and received wide acclaim from readers. Within just

three years of its publication, S. Mara Gd. had produced 13 novels, many of which are still reprinted today and are recognized as Indonesia's leading thriller stories. His productivity throughout the 1980s–1990s made detective fiction a popular genre in Indonesia. Hence, it is understandable why the 1980s are often referred to as the peak period of Indonesian detective fiction.

The wide reception from readers and the massive production of novels became the main factors that determined this trend. However, long before that, detective fiction had already been enjoyed by Indonesian readers. The difference lay only in its writing tradition. In its early introduction to Indonesia, detective fiction was presented through translations of Western detective stories serialized in newspapers and magazines (Chandra, 2016: 39; Jedamski, 2009: 350; Nieß, 2016: 378). Over time, Indonesian detective fiction developed its own formula. No longer limited to translations, it began to be created based on the social conditions surrounding the authors, evolving into prose forms—from short stories to novels, and even serial works (see detective-style novels from the 2000s to the 2010s). Similarly, the works of S. Mara Gd. have continued to shape the landscape of Indonesian detective fiction to this day. He remained consistently productive up to 2020, when he wrote the *Misteri Terakhir* (*The Final Mystery*) trilogy, published by Gramedia.

Beyond S. Mara Gd., the same period also saw popular names such as Djokolelono, Arswendo Atmowiloto, and Seno Gumira Ajidarma, who likewise presented detective stories, albeit not in large numbers. Djokolelono's *Astrid* series, for instance, was a detective-inflected serial published by Gramedia in 1980, including *Astrid & Bandit*, *Astrid dan Pelarian*, *Astrid di Palungloro*, *Astrid: Duel 2 Dukun*, *Astrid: Penculikan Tamu Negara*, *Astrid: Dibajak*, *Astrid: Shooting di Pulau Bencana*, *Astrid: Jatuh Cinta*, and *Astrid: Rumah Pohon*. Today, Djokolelono writes primarily for children's literature in the genre of science fiction, such as *Anak Rembulan* (*Negeri Misteri di Balik Pohon Kenari*) in 2011, *Penjelajah Antariksa* in 2015, and *Bintang Hitam* in 2019, among others.

Arswendo Atmowiloto's *Si Imung* is a children's detective story first serialized in *Hai* magazine around the 1980s. The series was later published as books by Gramedia in 1981 and eventually adapted into a TV film, *Detektif Cilik Imung*, broadcast by SCTV in the 1990s. In 2014, Gramedia reissued the *Imung*

series as a four-volume novel package: *Imung 1: Pembajakan Pesawat Terbang*, *Imung 2: Matinya Raja Batik*, *Imung 3: Operasi Lintah*, and *Imung 4: Selamatkan Bayi Kami*. The appearance of *Imung* was in dialogue with imported Western detective stories, contrived plotlines, or overly complex structures. Arswendo simplified the detective form by creating a more accessible narrative structure and grounding the setting close to everyday life.

Another figure is Seno Gumira Ajidarma. Although not primarily known for detective writing, Seno's works reveal such tendencies. His comic series *Sukab Intel Melayu: Misteri Harta Centini* (2002) demonstrates detective storytelling infused with discursive elements such as politics and satire of particular events during the New Order regime. Like much of his work, this comic directly references the socio-political atmosphere of the era. The quest for Centini's treasure under state power represents Seno's way of constructing the notion of "intelligence" through detective narrative. This idea of *intelligentsia* also appears in his short story "Pembunuhan" published by *Kompas* on 22 October 1978. In these texts, Seno does not foreground the detective character as the central force of the narrative; instead, he constructs detective structures and atmospheres as the story's foundation.

Seno's mode of writing demonstrates that detective fiction need not be rigid, with the detective as the sole agent playing "the rule of the game." The "detective mode" is applied more implicitly, involving the reader as the true detective, invited to decipher the narrative's "rules of the game." In this sense, the concept of *intelligentsia* in detective fiction dissolves into the very form of the narrative. Implicitly, this avoids the exclusive quality of detective fiction, which has traditionally emphasized search and investigation as the genre's main force. This exclusive quality, as Freeman observed, renders detective fiction a genre written only for intelligent readers, crafted with utmost quality, maintaining narrative integrity without digressions into love or desire, with the plot built carefully and all clues given directly to the reader. (Gulddal & Rolls, 2016: 6; Link, 2023: 85). By dissolving the detective figure into new narrative forms, the rigidity of detective fiction is loosened. The idea of *detective intelligentsia* can thus be transformed both in prose, such as short stories and novels.

After the 1980s, detective novels continued to

appear on the shelves of Indonesian literature, yet their presence was no longer as prominent as before. Although the 1980s marked the peak of the genre's commercial success, few writers consistently pursued it. After S. Mara Gd. and Aryono Gandy, only a handful of authors followed in their footsteps and managed to publish popular detective novels. Consequently, the prestige of Indonesian detective fiction began to fade as the third millennium approached (Firdausi, 2018). Previously, the genre had flourished in a relatively flexible environment, but it later had to adapt to a changing market landscape, tighter publishing regulations, and shifting public tastes. Heryanto (2008: 11–13) notes that since the 1980s, Indonesia has experienced major developments in cultural consumption and the rise of new mass media. The expansion of media outlets and large publishing houses made popular genres increasingly crowded and fragmented. Readers' preferences gradually shifted toward other forms such as youth fiction, horror, romance, and visual media, leading to a decline in the appeal of detective fiction.

This section focuses on how detective fiction from the 1990s to the 2010s was positioned within the landscape of Indonesian literature, even though during the 1990s the genre was considered to have experienced a decline in popularity. The decade was still dominated by earlier authors. Several works published during that period include S. Mara Gd.'s novels, such as *Misteri Dian yang Padam* (first written in 1984, with its sequels published in the 1990s), *Misteri Pesta Maut* (1990), *Misteri Alat Pembuka Amplop* (1991), *Misteri Kolam yang Dangkal* (1992), *Misteri Pembunuhan di Usaha Tando* (1999), and *Melisa Serial* (1989-1992). During this decade, the Indonesian literary system existed in a condition between openness and constraint. Historically, this was a period when the hegemonic ideology of the New Order remained strong, yet at the same time, cultural spaces began to display subtle signs of resistance (see Angelianawati et.al., 2025; Salam & Zamzuri, 2023; Sudewa, 2016). The Indonesian literary field at that time was still highly heteronomous, meaning that the logic of the market and the political interests of the state were more dominant than pure aesthetic autonomy.

Major publishing institutions such as Gramedia and the state itself played crucial roles as “agents” within the field of cultural production, determining

which works were deemed worthy of publication, promotion, and wide circulation. Publishers functioned not merely as instruments of economic production but also as mechanisms of symbolic consecration, granting legitimacy to works that aligned with market tastes and did not challenge the dominant ideology (see Heryanto, 2012). In this context, the position of S. Mara Gd.'s works—particularly his detective series such as *Misteri Dian yang Padam* (1985, though continued into the 1990s) and *Melisa* (1990)—occupies a semi-heteronomous space within the Indonesian literary system. His works did not operate entirely within the autonomous field of “serious” or experimental literature, yet they also cannot be reduced to mere market commodities devoid of symbolic or cultural value.

S. Mara Gd.'s works operate within a space of negotiation between economic capital and symbolic capital. He acquired substantial economic capital through publication by major publishing houses and wide readership among urban audiences seeking light intellectual entertainment. At the same time, his works possess cultural capital—the ability to adapt Western detective formulas to the Indonesian social context. In Bourdieu's terms (1993: 115–117), this position lies between the “field of large-scale production” and the “field of restricted production”: still dependent on mass-market tastes, yet characterized by creative strategies that confer additional symbolic value.

From the perspective of *habitus*, S. Mara Gd represents the archetype of the professional author during Indonesia's New Order era—productive, disciplined, and acutely attuned to market demands—while also embodying the moral ethos characteristic of that period: upholding truth, exposing wrongdoing, and restoring social order. This habitus aligns closely with the New Order's ideology, which emphasized stability and social morality (Bourchier, 2019; Heryanto, 2018; Suntana et al., 2023). Consequently, it is unsurprising that his works were never perceived as subversive by the state; on the contrary, they arguably reinforced the *doxa*—the unquestioned belief in the importance of social order. Within Bourdieu's framework of the literary field, S. Mara Gd effectively leveraged this safe position to accumulate symbolic capital in the form of public recognition, even if his works never entered the canon of “serious” literature.

Thus, the Indonesian literary system of the 1990s can be understood as a field marked by growing

tension between economic and symbolic logics. Works such as those by S. Mara Gd demonstrate how authors could survive—and even thrive—within a space that was not entirely autonomous, yet remained productive in navigating the interstices between market forces and ideological boundaries. He exemplifies an author adept at reading the “rules of the game” within the literary field—what Bourdieu terms *illusio*—where success is determined not solely by aesthetic quality but also by the ability to manage various forms of capital and interpret the structures of power that shape the literary world itself.

In the following two decades, Indonesian literature underwent a significant transformation. Within this evolving field, the position of a work or author does not arise naturally from the text alone but rather from competitive relationships among agents—authors, publishers, critics, award institutions, media, and readers—who contest various forms of capital: symbolic, cultural, economic, and social. In the early 2000s, for instance, works such as *Negara Kelima (The Fifth State)*, E.S. Ito, 2005) occupied a transitional position. The novel mobilized cultural capital through its historical research, gained economic capital through mainstream publishing circulation, and gradually accumulated symbolic capital through critical attention and an audience seeking multilayered narratives. As a result, *Negara Kelima* inhabited a semi-autonomous space—still bound by market logic yet functioning simultaneously as a text of social critique.

In the 2010s, a new generation of writers emerged—most notably Sabda Armandio with *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar (24 Hours with Gaspar)*—who appeared to pursue symbolic and cultural capital through formal innovation, intertextual experimentation, and institutional recognition, positioning themselves closer to the autonomous pole of the literary field. However, such achievements remained negotiated within the marketplace due to the continuing demands of distribution and audience reach, which ultimately determine how far a work can extend its readership without losing its aesthetic integrity. Hence, symbolic success in contemporary Indonesian literature depends not only on artistic innovation but also on an author’s capacity to mediate between market imperatives and autonomous aesthetic aspirations.

The novel’s appeal extends beyond the literary

sphere; its strong visual language and noir atmosphere inspired filmmaker Yosep Anggi Noen to adapt it into a feature film in 2023 under the same title. The film premiered at the *Busan International Film Festival* and received wide acclaim for successfully transforming the novel’s complex narrative into a fresh and contemplative cinematic experience. This adaptation not only expanded the audience reach of *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar* but also demonstrated how contemporary Indonesian literature is now capable of crossing media boundaries—bridging the symbolic capital of the literary field with the economic and cultural capital of the film industry.

The concept of autonomy–heteronomy helps illuminate this dynamic: works that shift their focus toward aesthetic experimentation and institutional critique move toward symbolic autonomy (where aesthetic value is prioritized), while those emphasizing commercial appeal remain situated within the heteronomous pole. However, as Bourdieu reminds us, the literary field is a site of struggle—there is no pure autonomy. Even a work like *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar* combines strategies for gaining critical recognition (consecration and symbolic accumulation) while maintaining access to the market (economic capital and distribution networks). Beyond these forms of capital, an author’s *habitus*—the aesthetic disposition shaped by educational background, professional experience, and social networks—also influences stylistic choices and artistic positioning. For instance, E.S. Ito’s *habitus* (informed by historical and journalistic training) supports a structured, investigative narrative, whereas Sabda Armandio’s *habitus* (emerging from a more experimental, independent community) leads toward a fragmented and reflective form.

Relations among agents and institutional responses also determine literary positioning: awards, mainstream media reviews, international translations, and appearances in festivals or competitions function as mechanisms of recognition that transform symbolic capital into legitimacy, moving a work from the margins toward the center of the literary constellation. Likewise, social capital—through networks of publishers, editors, creative communities, and digital platforms—facilitates circulation and readership formation, thereby strengthening or weakening a work’s relative position. Bourdieu’s concepts of *illusio* (the belief of actors in the value of the game) and *doxa* (the unchallenged norms within the field) explain why

some writers pursue institutional recognition despite the compromises it may entail: they “believe” in the stakes of the game, accumulating symbolic capital as a form of victory.

In short, during the 2000s, detective works such as *Negara Kelima* exemplified hybrid strategies—combining popular appeal with cultural depth—to occupy a semi-autonomous space, while in the 2010s, works like *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar* demonstrated a stronger accumulation of symbolic and cultural capital, elevating the detective genre to a more respected position within the literary field. The assertion that “a literary work or its author attains a particular position in the literary system based on the types of capital they possess (symbolic, cultural, economic, social), the degree of autonomy or heteronomy, the relations among agents, and institutional as well as reader responses” finds tangible expression in this dynamic: it is precisely this combination of capital and relational negotiation that determines whether a text becomes merely a popular commodity, a subject of serious critique, or both simultaneously within the constellation of contemporary Indonesian literature.

The Aesthetic Form and Ideological Structure

The development of Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s reveals that the genre has not only survived as a form of popular entertainment but has also transformed into a more complex space of expression. This shift in position, as explained through the previous theoretical perspective, paved the way for changes in the form and ideological orientation of detective fiction in the following decades. After occupying a dominant position in the realm of popular literature during the 1980s through the works of S. Mara Gd., Indonesian detective fiction began to diversify in both form and function, particularly as it entered the 2000s and 2010s.

At this point, the genre started to move beyond entertainment consumption toward a field of social and cultural reflection (see Salam & Zuliana, 2024). This phenomenon indicates a reciprocal relationship between the author’s social position, the literary production system, and the aesthetic strategies employed in the works. Thus, the reading of Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s cannot be detached from the broader socio-cultural transformations surrounding its production. This change in position

provides an important foundation for understanding how aesthetics and ideology within Indonesian detective fiction evolved alongside the social, political, and economic transformations of each decade.

Literature never stands autonomous from the material base and ideological structures of the society that produces it (Eagleton, 1976: 5). It is an ideological practice operating within culture to reproduce or negotiate dominant social relations (Eagleton, 1976: 45). Using this perspective, the form and ideology of Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s can be read as a reflection of the changing socio-political and economic structures across three periods: the New Order era (1980s–1990s), the post-Reformation period (2000s), and the post-digital and cultural neoliberalism era (2010s). The three works analyzed here—*Misteri Dian yang Padam* by S. Mara Gd. (1990), *Negara Kelima* by E.S. Ito (2005), and *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar* by Sabda Armandio (2014)—represent the shifting forms, ideological functions, and social positions of Indonesian detective fiction from one phase to another.

In the 1990s, S. Mara Gd.’s *Misteri Dian yang Padam* presented a conventional and linear detective narrative that followed a Western model of rationality, emphasizing logic, investigation, and moral resolution (Lestari et.al., 2020: 324). This narrative form aligns with the ideological conditions of the New Order regime, which prioritized stability, order, and control over social disorder (Heryanto, 2018). In Eagleton’s terms, such a form is not merely an aesthetic strategy but also a “structure of ideological feeling” that expresses the collective desire for truth and order amid fears of political and social disruption (Eagleton, 1976: 74).

Police figures such as Captain Kosasih function as moral agents of the state, enforcing law and rationality—reflecting the hegemony of New Order ideology that equated law and security with social order. Yet, beneath this narrative formalism lies what Eagleton calls a “symbolic act”: a literary attempt to sublimate unresolved social tensions. In a politically repressive society, detective fiction operates as a representational mechanism to channel public anxiety toward power, but in a politically safe manner—where crimes are solved, perpetrators are found, and the social system remains intact.

Entering the 2000s, the aesthetics and ideology of Indonesian detective fiction underwent a significant

transformation. E.S. Ito's *Negara Kelima* represents a shift from moralistic detective fiction to ideological investigation, where crime is no longer personal but systemic. This change signifies the emergence of new class and historical consciousness within post-New Order national awareness. The novel does more than tell a mystery; it deconstructs the grand narratives of history and power. Its non-linear structure—interwoven with historical documents, travel notes, and archives—mirrors both intellectual inquiry and investigative journalism.

In *Negara Kelima*, Ito narrates the search for an ancient manuscript connected to the history of national movements, political conspiracies, and global power networks. The protagonist, a journalist, is drawn into an investigation that uncovers hidden layers of history—from colonialism to the modern regime—revealing how power operates through the production of knowledge and the manipulation of archives. By combining documentary, investigative, and reflective styles, Ito positions the reader as part of the ideological unveiling process: demonstrating that historical truth itself is a contested field of discourse.

A similar pattern appears in *Rahasia Meede* (2007), where an archaeological adventure about treasure and colonial heritage transforms into a critique of global capitalism and post-New Order nationalism. Crime in this novel is not merely an individual act but a representation of institutional greed and economic exploitation that transcends national boundaries. Through a mix of historical documents, codes, and field notes, Ito expands detective fiction into a *historical-political thriller*—merging investigation with ideological deconstruction. This shift reveals that post-2000 Indonesian detective fiction no longer seeks a culprit but interrogates the structures of power that produce crime itself.

Thus, *Negara Kelima* functions not merely as popular entertainment but as a form of ideological practice—an effort to expose the layers of state ideology once perceived as absolute truths. Here, the novel's form itself operates as ideology: its fragmented, archival mode symbolizes a post-New Order society that has lost its totalizing narrative. In line with Eagleton's theory of the aesthetics of production, such a form emerges from new cultural production conditions, in which the circulation of capital, publishing markets, and post-1998 discursive freedoms generate hybrid forms between serious and popular literature.

Meanwhile, in the 2010s, Sabda Armandio's *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar* demonstrates the most radical transformation in both form and ideology. Its experimental, absurdist narrative, filled with temporal play, marks the emergence of detective fiction within the postmodern aesthetic regime—where investigation no longer aims to uncover a single truth but to dismantle the notion of truth itself. In Eagleton's view, this reflects an ideological shift from modernity to cultural neoliberalism, in which individuals lose moral and social orientation as everything becomes reduced to a play of signs and consumption. Gaspar is no longer a moral detective but a liminal figure lost between reality and simulacra. The fragmented and multilayered narrative functions as an ideological metaphor for late capitalism, where meaning, identity, and truth have become fluid. Yet it is precisely through this “unstable” form that *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar* articulates an ideological critique of cultural nihilism—reexamining the social function of literature and the human condition in a disoriented social order.

In this sense, Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s reveals a complex ideological trajectory: from a hegemonic function (affirming state stability in *Misteri Dian yang Padam*), to a critical function (unmasking historical ideology in *Negara Kelima*), and finally to a reflective-experimental function (expressing the crisis of meaning in *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar*). These aesthetic forms are not mere developments in narrative technique but represent shifts in the production and reproduction of ideology within Indonesian society. As Eagleton reminds us, aesthetics is politics in disguise—and within this context, Indonesian detective fiction becomes a field where ideology, the market, and social consciousness intersect, contend, and transform.

Detective Fiction as an Arena of Negotiation

The development of Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s reveals a far more complex dynamic than a mere shift in narrative form. The genre has evolved into a site of negotiation between popular discourse, politics, and culture. Whereas earlier detective fiction primarily functioned as entertainment governed by market logic, the post-1980 period marks a significant transformation—shifting from mere mass-cultural consumption toward a reflective and critical form of social representation. In this sense, detective

fiction becomes an arena where authors, ideologies, and social structures intersect, mutually affirm, and simultaneously critique one another.

As Bourdieu (1993: 115) asserts, the literary field operates through dynamic relations among agents, capital, and position. The shifting position of detective fiction within the Indonesian literary field can thus be understood as a movement from heteronomous domination—subordination to market principles and the tastes of mass readers—toward a form of autonomy, in which literary works acquire cultural legitimacy through the symbolic and cultural capital possessed by their authors. Writers such as E.S. Ito and Sabda Armandio exemplify how detective fiction can transcend the conventional boundaries of popular genres.

In *Negara Kelima (The Fifth Country, 2005)*, E.S. Ito intertwines the narrative structure of detective fiction with a critique of power, state ideology, and the spiritual confinement of modernity. The novel operates within what Bourdieu terms a *restricted field of production*, in which aesthetic autonomy is mobilized to negotiate ideological and symbolic meanings within a national context. Meanwhile, Sabda Armandio's *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar (2014)* demonstrates how detective fiction can fluidly navigate between two poles of the literary field: on one hand, it retains popular appeal through its light and absurd style; on the other, it offers a critical reflection on history, death, and social absurdity. Through this process, Indonesian detective fiction accumulates new forms of symbolic capital, transforming itself from a marginal genre into an integral component of the national literary system.

This transformation can also be interpreted as a shift in aesthetic form that simultaneously entails an ideological transformation. Eagleton (1976: 89) asserts that aesthetics is not merely a domain of form or style, but an ideological field where social values operate symbolically. In this context, the transition from conventional detective narratives—such as those found in S. Mara Gd's works of the 1990s—to postmodern metafictional forms like *24 Jam Bersama Gaspar* reveals that Indonesian detective fiction no longer serves as a reproduction of stable ideology—that is, a moral dichotomy between right and wrong—but rather as a reflective medium that exposes the social contradictions and ideological tensions of modern society. These new narratives dismantle

assumptions of singular truth and demonstrate how the real “mystery” lies within the mechanisms of power, history, and national identity itself. Consequently, detective fiction functions as a medium for reading ideology through popular aesthetics—transforming entertainment into a vehicle of social critique.

Furthermore, post-1980 Indonesian detective fiction exhibits a distinctive local character that diverges from Western models. It no longer imitates the deductive structure of Sherlock Holmes or the rationality of Hercule Poirot but adapts itself to Indonesia's social, political, and cultural contexts. Crime is not merely understood as an individual act of transgression but as a metaphor for structural violence, state oppression, and the spiritual loss of modern society. Thus, the genre becomes an arena of ideological negotiation where popular discourse intersects with critical consciousness. It embodies the tension between market logic and aesthetic values, between entertainment and enlightenment, between the pleasure of reading and the awareness of political realities.

The position of Indonesian detective fiction within the national literary landscape can therefore be understood as a form of productive dialectic. On one hand, it continues to rely on popular appeal to reach a broad readership; on the other, it carries a reflective potential capable of negotiating social, political, and moral issues with subtlety. Within this framework, detective fiction is no longer merely a genre of entertainment but a symbolic field where values, power, and meaning are continuously renegotiated. Thus, the evolution of Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s marks a stage of maturity in the Indonesian literary field—when the boundaries between “high” and “popular” art begin to dissolve, and literature becomes a dynamic arena where aesthetics and ideology converge in their most vibrant forms.

CONCLUSION

After the 1980s, the position of Indonesian detective fiction shifted from a semi-heteronomous to a semi-autonomous status within the literary field. Through a comparison of three representative authors—S. Mara Gd., E.S. Ito, and Sabda Armandio—it becomes evident that the genre transformed from popular entertainment subject to market logic (S. Mara Gd.)

into works with higher symbolic and cultural value (E.S. Ito and Sabda Armandio). This shift indicates that Indonesian detective fiction is no longer merely a commercial genre but has become a site of negotiation between economic, cultural, and symbolic capital, expanding its aesthetic legitimacy within the contemporary Indonesian literary system.

Aesthetically, Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s shows a transformation from conventional, linear narratives to experimental, metafictional, and fragmentary forms, reflecting changing societal perspectives on truth, history, and social reality. Ideologically, the genre shifted from a hegemonic function that reinforced state stability (during the New Order era) to a critical function that deconstructs power ideologies (in the post-Reformasi era) and finally to a reflective function that questions the crisis of meaning and values in postmodern society (in the digital and cultural neoliberal era). The aesthetic and ideological forms of post-1980s Indonesian detective fiction not only illustrate narrative evolution but also mirror transformations in social structures and ideological consciousness, making it a field where popular aesthetics function as political practice and an arena for cultural negotiation.

Furthermore, Indonesian detective fiction after the 1980s—particularly in the 2000s and 2010s—also developed into a space for negotiating social, political, and cultural discourses. Through the representative works mentioned above, the genre demonstrates how it transcends the boundaries of popular entertainment by incorporating critiques of power, state ideology, history, and social tensions. Its experimental, metafictional, and reflective aesthetic forms allow detective narratives to present mysteries not merely as criminal conflicts, but as symbols of structural and ideological tensions within society. Consequently, post-1980s Indonesian detective fiction functions as a symbolic field where values, power, and meaning are renegotiated, serving not only as a form of entertainment but also as a tool for critical reflection on Indonesia's social, political, and cultural realities.

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The authors hereby declare that this article is entirely free from any conflict of interest concerning data collection, analysis, editorial procedures, and the

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