

Homemade comics hit Surabaya

Indra Harsaputra, The Jakarta Post, Surabaya | Feature | Sun, July 25 2010, 4:35 PM

Yo opo cuk kabare (What's up, brother)

Koen lali yo cuk ambek aku (You don't remember me, do you?)

This is an excerpt from a conversation in local Surabaya dialect between two characters in the animated film series Grammar Suroboyo, made by celebrated artist Mohammad Sholikin of Gatotkaca Studio.

Grammar Suroboyo marked the birth of a trend in locally made comics, which are increasingly popular among teenagers in the East Java capital, amid an invasion of Japanese manga.



JP/Indra Harsaputra

Renato, 20, a communication studies student at a private university in Rungkut, Surabaya, said he had saved two episodes of the series to his cell phone. Renato often watched the series with friends in his spare time, he said, despite having already watched it several times.

"If people from Central Java watch this series they might find it full of harsh language, but not for Surabaya

people. We find it amusing," he told *The Jakarta Post* in a recent interview.

Dancuk, for example, is a dirty word but for Surabayans has become a colloquial word that can be used in place of "hello," "goodbye" or sometimes even "nice to meet you".

Renato, born in Mojokerto, a small town 50 kilometers from Surabaya, started reading comics when he was 10. Most of the comics in his collection are manga titles such as Dragon Ball, Captain Kid and Detective Conan.

Renato also has a collection of classic Marvel superhero comics such as Superman and Spiderman, as well as European titles such as the Asterix series. He buys comics from book stores to add to his collection, but goes to book rental stores to read Indonesian comics penciled by Ganes TH and Harya "Hasmi" Suryaminata. The comics of the adventures of *Si Buta dari Gua Hantu* (The Blind Warrior from the Ghost Cave) and *Gundala Putra Petir* (Gundala, the son of Thunder) were a hit in the 1970s.

It was only four months ago Renato read Area 31, a comic that depicts Surabaya — from its wet markets to its red-light district (famous throughout Southeast Asia) — made by local artists.



"That was when I realized there was a younger generation of comic artists here in Indonesia," he said.

Kathleen Azali, the manager of Comics and Cultural Books Library C20 in Surabaya said many young readers failed to recognize locally made comics because popular manga titles were often easier to find in book stores. However, she said, local comics were available at her library.

Its local titles include Dark 48 by Daniel Indro, Garudayana by Is Yuniarto, Makar Mekar and Ora Ubet Ora Nglivet by Iwank Yellowteeth from Yogyakarta, Buletik Komik by Malang comic artists and Semar Mesem made by Bunuh Diri comic community in Surabaya.

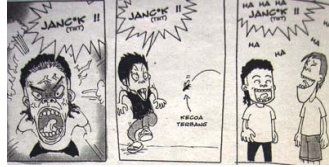
The library, situated around 200 meters from the US consulate office, is one of two such comic libraries used as a reference by comic artists, activists and fans, to exchange ideas as well as to enrich their collections. The other is located in Bandung, West Java.

The organized distribution of manga in Indonesia makes Japanese comics often easier to find than European or American comics. The adaptation of several titles by Hollywood movie makers has also made it harder for local comic artists to penetrate the market unless they use

Japanese-like pen names.

French comic artist Clement Baloup said manga had also invaded Europe, but that local comics were still popular.

“Maybe local artists have to find characters familiar to Indonesians to jack the industry back up,” he told the Post in Surabaya last month.



His reportage-style comics *Le choix de Hai* and *Un automne a'Hanoi* — written in French — can be found at the Surabaya library. Another graphic novel in the library, *Palestine* by Maltese comic journalist Joe Sacco currently residing in the US, has been translated into Indonesian by Mizan publishing.

“It’s difficult to find more reportage-style comics in Surabaya because most of them are put in the novels section at book stores because their covers usually look like those of novels,” Kathleen said.

Many local comic artists in Surabaya use such comics as a reference. The community is currently preparing a work on the journey of Max Havelaar authored by Multatuli.

“We want to get back to the creative industry,” Kathleen said.

The Comic Artist’s Society of Surabaya regularly takes part in events such as the Comic Show Off and Surabaya Book Fair.

Visiting Bandung comic artist Aziza Noor said many local publishers had helped artists publish their work, including Gramedia comic division M&C and the newly established Cendana Art Media.

“Many artists prefer to publish their work using the Internet or social networking media such as Facebook. We hope Indonesian comics will not be forgotten, but give birth to a younger generation of local comic artists,” Aziza said.

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