



# “My Treasure from Piles of Garbage”: Benowo Surabaya Scavengers in the Study of Daily Life

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**Abstract.** This study discusses a new perspective on writing Indonesian history by presenting a model of the History of Daily Life. This theme is interesting to be raised because the previous historical writing model presents more historical writing that is ruler-centric. The objects that will be studied are the scavenger communities at the Benowo Final Disposal Site in Surabaya. This element of small society needs attention in the writing of history, because this marginal group is rarely touched in the writing of Indonesian history. The use of the subaltern approach is an option in this study by elevating the role of the marginalized lower layers of society. Of course, the use of visual anthropology methods will be tried in unraveling the existence of these scavenger community groups in historical studies. This material seems to have been overlooked in Indonesian historical records because it is rarely disclosed in history learning materials at various levels. This research will analyze the problem from the perspective of social history and how to reveal the daily life of scavengers who are economically involved in overcoming the problems of the group’s welfare.

**Keywords:** daily life history · scavengers · Surabaya

## 1 Introduction

There has been a shift in historical research over the last few decades especially regarding subjects, perspectives, and approaches. A shift from a grand process to a person’s experience focused on the history of everyday life. The history of everyday life was developed by Henri Lefebvre and Alf Ludtke. Both historians advocate a subaltern approach to the lives of actors and popular culture [1]. This study tries to use this new approach by examining the life patterns of scavengers in Surabaya and Bali.

Talking about scavengers in various big cities in Indonesia incessantly remains an interesting theme. There is a curious question regarding their existence if it is traced since when did scavengers start to exist, and how did scavenging work appear in Indonesian history? Or, what is their place in Indonesian history?

The presence of scavengers in Indonesian history cannot be separated from the development of vagrant behavior and the development of cities in Indonesia. In “Business Throughout the Ages” contained in the Homeless: A Social Scientist’s View, Onghokham mentions the habit of being homeless as no different from wandering or wandering.

Usually done by the knights of the kingdoms in the archipelago. Denys Lombard in *Nusa Jawa Silang Budaya II* considers vagabonds to have two different faces in society: as savages who move from place to place and *satrya lelana* who seek wisdom [2].

Then the archipelago moved towards the industrialization era at the end of the 19th century. Manufacturing factories made by the Dutch and Europeans were established in a number of cities in the Dutch East Indies. Experts and skilled workers drive the factory, producing all kinds of goods that the townspeople need. The city then became the center of the circulation of money and the fate of many people. People from the villages came to the cities in search of a better life. Some managed to find work, others could not find work so they wandered around the city without money in their pockets and a permanent place to live. They are then called vagrants. They make money from begging and eating whatever can be obtained on the streets.

When Indonesia entered the realm of independence, the symptoms of wandering due to economic pressure were still evident in many big cities such as Jakarta, Yogyakarta, Bandung, Semarang, and Surabaya. These cities are densely populated cities in Indonesia. Urban migration causes the population in this city to continue to increase from year to year. And the increase in population leads to an increase in the production of solid waste in the city.

Plastic technology spread throughout the world in the 1950s. In Indonesia, at that time, many clothing, beverage and food products began to be wrapped in plastic. While some other products use canned materials as filling wrappers. People take the contents, then throw away the package. But some people see the package still has a use value. There are still other people who are willing to pay for the packaged garbage. This is where the homeless see an opportunity to earn money. They took the packaged garbage and put it in a wooden basket hanging from their back. Homeless people who are looking for a living through garbage are then called scavengers. They become the spearhead of an economic system formed from factories that collect used goods and agents. They supply glass, metal, plastic, scrap wood, shredded paper, and all sorts of other solid wastes to thrift factories. The scavengers pick up the garbage from residential garbage bins and garbage dumps on the outskirts of the city. They explore the dirtiest corners of the capital while carrying wooden baskets or sacks for found waste.

This research is focused on, Surabaya within the framework of developing a historical research method model for the History Research Methods course at Departments of History Education, Faculty of Social Sciences and Law, State University of Surabaya.

## 2 Method

This research goes through the following procedures: 1. Determine the title or subject of the research to be researched or investigated. 2. Looking for evidence (proof) or source materials (both primary sources and secondary sources) needed (Heuristics). This second stage includes the technique of recording from source materials (note-taking) in bibliographical cards. 3. Assess or test source materials with external criticism (external criticism) and internal criticism (internal criticism) to determine the authenticity (authenticity: truth, validity, authenticity) of source materials before being used in research (criticism). 4. Construction and Communication Stage: carry out construction (compilation and writing or synthesis of research results or findings) in simple, straightforward

and scientific language, so that it can be well communicated to the readers (Synthese and Historical Writing). The result of the synthesis and writing of history is a scientific historical essay or critical historical essay (historiography) [3].

### 3 Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 Concept of Daily Life History

The history of everyday life is an attempt to record the daily lives of citizens, but not exclusively the lives of ordinary people. The history of everyday life has developed in cultural studies. Ben Highmore (2002) published a collection of writings that present a variety of approaches [4]. However, the problem with this overview is that it uses too much abstract theory, so that the “everyday situation” becomes more and more problematic and difficult to reach. The practical consequences of all these theoretical explorations are not explained further because of the difficulty of capturing everyday life. In Indonesia today that is developing now and disappearing the next day. The history of everyday life aims to find out how large structures, patterns and processes manifest themselves in the daily lives of ordinary Indonesians.

Archives of everyday life in Indonesia are in the form of audiovisual archives. Historians face problems that must be solved because they only focus on written texts. This also applies to people who are involved in cultural studies and tend to see the world as a collection of texts. Audiovisual representations of everyday life are not meant to be paintings to decorate written texts. Instead the other way around The great thing about the history of everyday life is to create archives of images and sounds. On that basis, new perspectives can be opened and various narratives can be explored. Archives require specific methodologies to conceptualize new categories of analysis.

Although this approach is still aimed at writing history, the methodology is that of anthropologists. Therefore, we will briefly discuss some aspects of visual anthropologists who in general, there are three genres [5]. First, media studies (film, television, etc.) whose analysis focuses on visual representation. This fast-growing field overlaps with cultural studies.

The second genre covers a broad field of recording in the context of a particular research project. In this context, certain ceremonies, performances or interviews are recorded. Such recordings serve as illustrations for written texts and can also be used as documentaries.

Another topic that has been debated concerns the camera. Can the camera be considered a neutral observer? Or the camera as an actor actively taking part in a filming location? In a seemingly neutral observation of a fixed camera position and the camera’s active involvement in social situations.

The Lumiere brothers used a simple procedure. They chose subjects they thought might be interesting to record, mounted the camera in front of the subject, and ran the camera until the film ran out. Any ordinary event - Baby at the Lunch table, A boat leaving Harbor - can serve their purpose of simply recording what is happening. They use a film camera as a recording tool. The only advantage over a fixed camera is that it can capture motion elements.

In the 1950s this approach was continued in France in a way that was refined by the makers of *cinéma vérité* who recorded reality by eliminating camera intervention. The camera as a subjective agent must be turned into an objective observer. A number of filmmakers who advocated ‘shooting this observational style film’ followed such a principle that they refused to conduct interviews. Therefore, interviews are considered as a form of intervention that cannot be tolerated. In an interesting article, Jeanne Hall (1991) points out the big difference between theory and practice. In theory, the film should simply reflect the observations made by the camera [6]. However, the editing process resulted in a very well-organized narrative. In attempting to produce “authentic” texts for visual evidence, anthropologists may not be particularly interested in narrative continuity. He is more interested in maintaining a cultural image.

Although Leonard Retel said that his films are about the daily life of a village in Jakarta based on recorded observations, if you look closely, you can see that many of the scenes are made up. We didn’t know beforehand, what would happen when the camera started to activate? We didn’t repeat the shots to get better results. Although this may give a neutral impression, it is still recognized that shooting itself is already an interference in people’s lives.

The last two genres relate to efforts to invite people to actively participate in the shooting process. They either evaluate an existing record or they are given a camera. One strategy is to record a crowd of people watching their own footage. They have the opportunity to reflect and comment on what they see. Nijland’s research on Tobelo marriage (1989) is an example of this strategy. In fact, marriage itself is no longer the main topic.

### 3.2 Scavengers in Everyday Life in Documentary Films

The existence of scavengers certainly raises various assumptions about scavengers themselves, people tend to be apathetic with the presence of scavengers. Many of the community members think that scavengers are a group of workers who do not understand and do not instill character in themselves. People think that scavengers are long-handed, scavengers are very dirty, and so on. In fact, if you look closely, scavengers are a component of society that has a big role in saving the environment. They sort the waste, so that objects that are considered trash by the community can be reused through the waste recycling process. Thus, the volume of waste that accumulates in the surrounding environment is a problem that will never end and can be minimized by scavengers [7].

The scavengers may not understand what the true meaning of a hero is. In fact, they have applied the values of true heroism into his every blood stream, breath, and sweat. They are willing to sacrifice to be humiliated with no strings attached to suing him. They are willing to be given a negative perception of being a thief with no strings attached to a rebellion. They also let themselves be roasted by the hot sun to meet the demands of their relatives’ stomachs [8].

Through this documentary video, the author describes all the social aspects experienced by scavengers in Surabaya. The author chooses to present it in the form of a documentary video because it can be seen in accordance with the existing reality without any additional drama scenes, so that the problems that will be raised look realistic because they are equipped with direct interviews with sources. Therefore, with this

documentary video media, researchers are trying to help change the negative paradigm (mindset) regarding the life of scavengers. The challenge in this documentary video is how can the author present a picture of the reality of scavengers at Landfills Benowo to be able to change people's mindsets without losing the cinematography side?

Documentary filmmaking conducts research (in-depth data collection) to strengthen ideas and develop them. The results research become the starting point for the formation of a global framework regarding the direction and purpose of the narrative as well as the subjects who will become characters in the film's character. After knowing the results research, the treatment (development of the film synopsis) can be immediately written in writing to facilitate the implementation of the production. In one synopsis: "My treasure from the garbage heap".

The sun slowly began to appear, the time showed 05.00 o'clock. Around the mountains of garbage and the smell that stings the noses of every human being around it has begun to be crowded with residents. One by one, there were even groups of people who all flocked to the area where they were sorting out among the mountains of garbage. The atmosphere at the landfill in Benowo is so crowded every day, the scavengers gather to look for used goods that can still be recycled and reused, when the garbage truck arrives at the landfills, the scavengers do not hesitate to immediately storm the truck, with life at stake. As if there is no satisfaction in just searching among the mountains of garbage, the scavengers climb on the back of the truck without regard for their safety to scramble to find the rest of the items that can still be used. In addition to riding on the back of a moving truck, there are also scavengers who are looking for a mountain of garbage by following the bulldozer that breaks down the pile of garbage. The heat of the sun and the unpleasant smell in the landfill environment did not discourage them from collecting used goods that could be sold to collectors. Usually from these collectors the waste obtained will be recycled into goods that can be reused by the community.

The capital brought by a scavenger is a tool for taking goods and a basket, both of which are tools that scavengers use to find used bottles and cans. Although there are only two tools, namely a pick-up tool and a basket, not all scavengers have these two tools. Some of them only use sacks and hands directly to collect plastic that can be sold.

Some people may perceive that scavenging is a humiliating and disgusting job. This perception is manifested in the form of rejection of the existence of scavengers such as being given the words "scavengers are prohibited from entering". This is done because they think that scavengers are the same as thieves. However, this negative view cannot dampen the enthusiasm of the scavengers to keep trying to earn a fortune in the midst of the smell, dirt and criticism that accompanies them. In today's expensive era, the scavenger profession is a promising job for some scavengers, this is evidenced by the fact that a scavenger is able to support his wife and two children even though he has to struggle amidst the rigors of urban life that is gripping for a scavenger.

He is Parman (33 years). The man who graduated from elementary school was willing to move from his hometown to earn a living for his family to Surabaya. Surabaya is Parman's goal to earn a living to meet the needs of his family, Parman depends on his life as a scavenger to scavenge plastic. Sincere intentions and strong determination made Parman determined to work as a scavenger. For Parman scavengers are jobs that suit him. Not wanting to be a worker who follows other people's orders is a principle that

has been ingrained in Parman. According to him, by scavenging he can work without any coercion from others and what is certain is that the results are also from his own spirit [6].

Parman picks up trash every day at the Benowo landfills. Several sacks and lunch supplies, Parman stepped out for his determination to support his wife and children in the village. Parman departs from 06:00 o'clock. The supplies he brought were meant to be enjoyed during his lunch break at the landfills location. After the time shows 17:00 o'clock. Parman and other scavengers rushed to leave the location because the landfills officers would close the landfills at 17.00 o'clock. With sacks, Parman can collect at least 7 bags of plastic and on average, Parman can collect 10 sacks every day.

From 7 to 10 sacks he gets every day, Parman's average income is around 70 thousand per day. For him, 70 thousand per day is the result of his hard work which can meet the daily needs of his wife and two children who are already in junior high school and one is still a toddler. Every 3 weeks Parman sells his pulung produce to collectors and then returns to his hometown to release his longing for the family at home. Most of the scavengers in landfills Benowo are immigrants, they come from various regions with the aim of becoming a scavenger without any coercion and the demands of working time are the reasons for them to choose a profession as scavengers.

Production: Documentary film production is not the same as making fiction films, because the basic concept of making documentary films is to interpret reality in the form of images as they are [9]. The difficulty is quite high when compared to fiction films because in documentaries, every scene is natural or spontaneous.

Documentary film production is not required to carry excessive equipment like fiction filmmaking, because it requires natural images, so the cameraman must be professional and flexible so that he is able to take pictures that are spontaneous or in all shooting location conditions. It took quite a long time to produce due to several reasons, including: the schedule that had been prepared did not run smoothly, the team members were limited and the location was often in remote places. In documentary production, one must have patience and perseverance, patiently waiting for the momentum of a special scene, for example. In addition to patience, it also requires motivation and sensitivity to the environment in which the subject is and acts [10].

The use of direct sound (narrative) by researchers with the aim of being able to maintain and fence the continuity of the existing reality so that there is no manipulation of the facts on the ground as expressed by Ayawaila, Gerzon R. “Director's interpretation can chop up existing stories. Therefore, the use of direct sound can maintain and guard the continuity of this reality.”

The documentary film approach has two points of departure, including essays and narratives. In this study, researchers combine two things that become the starting point, namely combining essays and narratives to attract readers or viewers to pay more attention to the contents of the documentary that explains the facts, the reality of the role of scavengers at landfills Benowo. The characters formed in the making of this documentary are useful in providing an observation about the mindset towards reality and the role of scavengers at landfills Benowo. This documentary is important as a historical record and can be used as a source of historical research.

## 4 Conclusion

Based on the research results and the results of the work that has been made, the presence of scavengers in the Benowo area in particular raises a very meaningful role for the community and the surrounding environment. This shows that the profession as a scavenger is a life choice that must be accounted for because it is a choice of his life. Working as a scavenger is also not a despicable job like the negative perception of society in general. This is evidenced by the facts on the ground showing that scavengers are able to support their families and there are even scavengers who are successful in pursuing a career that started as a scavenger. The income earned by scavengers on average per month can also be said to meet the standards to be able to meet the daily needs of their families. The negative perception of most people can be slightly changed through documentary films. That is, by showing some of the facts found in the field, it is hoped that the community will not underestimate and despise and regard the scavenger profession as the same as a thief.

Benowo scavengers have been around since the city of Surabaya developed. Scavengers have an important position in the economic development and urban planning of Surabaya. As an inseparable part of the pulse of the development of the city of Surabaya. The history of everyday life explaining social phenomena is included in the category of social history. Surabaya scavengers are not only a way to answer Surabaya's economic problems. It is not a social picture of poverty but shows a symbolic picture of urban society. The relationship between scavengers as a symbolic representation as a space for social gatherings, as a work and living space, as well as a space for political discourse. Like the scavengers of the city of Surabaya, which consists of various ethnicities and groups. In the midst of modernity and luxury that the city of Surabaya has to offer, there is room for social scavenger groups to improve their lives.

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