

# The Life Potrait of Urban Society within *O*, the Novel by Eka Kurniawan

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**Abstract**—Jakarta never fails to attract people attention as a representative of developed cities. Nevertheless, *O* the novel showed the contrast. It portrayed social polemic characters' behavior to face or experience them. The present research aimed at describing the result of contemplation of the urban society life. Results showed that in the novel, the author represented a moment through the characters and setting which reflect urbanization phenomena, criminality, poverty, social gap, informal profession, apathy, and materialistic life style are some portraits of another side urbanites life in Jakarta. The representation was in accordance with the reality occurring in Jakarta recently.

**Keywords**—urban society; literature sociology

## I. INTRODUCTION

*O* the novel by Eka Kurniawan is well known by the dominance of social issues. The issues do not only illustrate what happens in a setting but also describe the characters' roles in their social surrounding, convey the reality neglected by recent people, and at the end communicate various complex and complicated problems of people's life.

According to Ahmadi, et al., *O* the novel has posthumanism allegory. By its socio-political context, events experienced by animals are the symbols connecting to Indonesian people behavior to try modern life style trends [1]. The research finding indicates that through its context, the Indonesian people here refer to people living in Jakarta.

The stories of people in the novel focus on people living in a particular setting, in which the setting influences them. The setting emerged is depicted to affect people's behavior and attitude in their daily life.

In the real life, Jakarta cannot be separated from people attention of its representation of a developed city. However, *O* the novel explains the contrast. It shows readers social polemics and the characters' attitude towards them.

## II. METHODS

The present research employed qualitative research. Literature sociology approach was applied involving the literature study of a literary work and its social aspects relationship.

The data were gathered from *O* the novel by Eka Kurniawan with 470 pages, published by PT Gramedia Pustaka Utama, first edition of March 2016. The data used were quotations from the novel. The quotations had relevancy with the research focus concerning urban society life.

## III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

By the application of literature sociology analysis, *O* the novel by Eka Kurniawan depicts the urban society life complexity in Jakarta. From many aspects, life in this city is illustrated as a very complicated one, adorned by polemics and intricate business. A number of phenomena are delineated as never-ending social problems. The urban life sketched in novel *O* is realized in a setting overshadowing the characters. The setting of the novel functions as social identity embodied in the characters' behavior as Jakarta inhabitants.

### A. Urbanization

Urbanization portrayed in *O* the novel occurs in Ma Kungkung's life. The story is narrated below.

*Mereka datang dari pedalaman Jawa. Di satu musim kering yang berkepanjangan dan keduanya tak memperoleh pekerjaan apa pun di sawah maupun ladang, Ma Kungkung memutuskan untuk pergi ke Jakarta bersama seorang tetangga kampung [2].*

The lines infer the reason of Ma Kungkung coming to Jakarta, namely for the difficulties to find a job in her village. Therefore, she decides to come to Jakarta joining her neighbor who has lived a living for 3 years in Jakarta.

Ma Kungkung decision coming to Jakarta is due to the temptation of looking at her neighbor experience. This shows an agreement with Jamaludin's idea that what trigger urbanites to come to Jakarta is its promise of economic side [3].

The finding of the present research is also strengthened by Park's research admitting that "Jakarta in its nature is a city of (internal) migrants [4]. Reflecting the diversity of the nation, one can find in Jakarta Indonesians from every corner of the archipelago with different cultural backgrounds". This tells us that Jakarta has been popular as a place for various Indonesian ethnics to gather regarding its status as the center of the country.

### B. Social Gap

Social gap in *O* the novel is depicted through the industrialization effect and the attitude between wealthy and poor people. The gap of industrialization is pointed out by the use of rice field for non-agricultural activities, such as industry, housing, trading and service as well [3]. The industrialization process can be observed in the following lines.

*Sedikit di luar Jakarta, terdapat sebuah permukiman kecil yang terserak di pinggir jalan tol. Jauh sebelumnya permukiman itu merupakan bagain dari satu perkampungan besar, hingga jalan tol membelah mereka dan memisahkan permukiman itu dengan perkampungan lainnya di seberang jalan [2].*

Highways construction is one of the industrializations intended to increase the development sector. However, in fact, this creates a gap as the highways' users are those who have cars. On the other hand, slummed areas emerging around the highways are the social phenomenon leading to the gap. Since from the two places, the difference between the have and the poor is totally visible.

### C. Materialistic Life Style

The urban society life style which tends to be materialistic is demonstrated by someone addiction towards money. The following quotation portrays the phenomenon.

*Entang Kosasih benci partai politik yang membawanya, tapi mereka membayarnya paling besar. Satu koran bahkan menyebut ia salah satu dari lima penyanyi paling mahal yang dibayar di masa pemilihan umum. Demi uang itu, ia menutup mata dengan kebenciannya [2].*

The lines take place once Endang Kosasih accepts the offers to take part in one party campaign. The lines mark her unsynchronized way of thinking and behaving. Although she hates the political party, she keeps accepting the offer for the big salary she receives. For the sake of wealthy, she settles to shut her mind up.

This phenomenon also comes up in Nyai Banjarwati's life. To get property, she conducts misbehavior by performing pesugihan (a heretic ritual mystic to get rich instantly). She has been practicing it for quite long time and this helps her to survive. The lines prove the story.

*Nyai Banjarwati pernah melakukan hal ini sebelumnya. Dengan cara itulah ia dan suaminya hidup. Di malam-malam tertentu, suaminya menjadi babi dan ia menjaga lilin. Uang datang begitu saja, berhamburan di sekeliling lilin, memenuhi lantai kamarnya. Dengan uang itu mereka tak hanya mengisi perut setiap hari, tapi juga membangun rumah dan membeli ladang dan sawah. [2].*

Nyai Banjarwati, by the lines, represents modern people way of thinking to believe in tradition. To Supriatin the tradition is categorized into mystical efforts. She argues people perform it due to poverty factor and willingness to change their fate [5].

The above lines also evince how Nyai Banjarwati earns wealth from practicing pesugihan together with her husband.

### D. Poverty

According to Damsar and Indrayani, poverty in cities can be traced by looking at slummed houses, vagrants or beggars, and informal sectors [6]. In conjunction with the theory, the poverty in Jakarta as the capital city is identified in the novel *O*. The following quotation represents the theory.

*Ma Kungkung akhirnya bertahan hidup di sana, di dekat pembuangan sampah. Ia mulai melihat seorang perempuan menyeret-nyeret karung, mencari botol plastik dan kardus. Ia mencoba mengikutinya, lalu perlahan mulai memungut botol plastik dan kardus untuknya sendiri [2].*

The quotation shows that Ma Kungkung works in informal sectors, collecting wreckage. Poverty has been stricken her for she gets no clue of place she lives in. After being separated uncoincidentally from her friends, she has no ability to conquer Jakarta, she loses directions, then she decides to collect the wreckage to live her life.

The story is in line with Savirani, et al. research that "As with Indonesia as a whole, poverty is a major problem in the capital city [7]. Official statistics from March 2016 show that 384,000 people – 3.75 per cent of the total population of Jakarta – were living in poverty". Based on the relevance, *O* the novel portrays reality by emerging poor people condition and under standard life.

### E. Apathy in Social Life

In Daldjoeni's point of view, people in cities typically do not concern on other people's individual behavior [8]. The behavior in the novel is reflected in the following excerpt.

*Para penjual minuman dan makanan tak peduli, hanya menoleh sesekali. Bagi mereka, itu urusan tuan dan budaknya [2].*

The event takes place once Betalumur figure tortures *O* figure in a public place. Nonetheless, the people around there show no care about it. It is certain that Jakarta's people exhibit apathy for letting such criminal things happen. Unless the things may be harmful and cannot be tolerated, they will not allow it.

The result is also in connection with Imam's research report saying that in *O* the novel, the characters are depicted to have low social care, selfish and preying on others [9].

### F. Informal Sector Professions

The increase of various informal professions in urban regions appear for the urbanites' incompetence, for not being able to complete the job qualifications. However, the professions basically save those people. As reported by Badan Pusat Statistik that informal sector professions become the savior to overcome unemployment problems [10].

Additionally, the appearance of informal professions in Jakarta is due to the unbalance number of job seekers and the

job vacancies offered. The professions existence is reflected in the following lines.

*Sebelum mereka sampai di perempatan jalan langganan mereka, keduanya akan melewati deretan penjual kaki lima yang memenuhi badan trotoar. Banyak hal dijual di sana, dari baju anak-anak, arloji murah, sepatu bekas, buku doa, parfum, hingga umbi-umbian kering yang dipercaya meningkatkan stamina tubuh [2].*

It is obvious that the location of market is a place to facilitate urban society activities. On one hand, the professions are regarded a solution for jobless people and job seekers, however, on the other hand, this contributes to a new problem for they have no facilities to execute their economic activities. The phenomenon arises a new challenge for the governance since it disgraces the city magnificence and policy [11].

Despite this phenomenon, there is another fact saying that informal sectors provide a commendable role to increase economic sectors. Simone admits "...many important economic domains articulate a wide range of logics, practices, means of remuneration, and temporalities" [12].

#### G. Neglected Areas

Although cities are typically over populated, some areas are ignored by the owners. The phenomenon is illustrated below.

*Ia berhenti berjingkrak-jingkrak, dan tatapan matanya menerawang ke arah tanah kosong yang dipenuhi belukar dan sisa bangunan di seberang jalan [2].*

The neglected areas in urban regions seem to be less important business. Whereas, if the owners are aware of the areas, they can be much more beneficial for the people in the surroundings.

#### H. Improper Housing

To Bintarto, R, urbanites living in cities live very poorly for most of them do not have homes, or their homes are not proper to live in [13]. The excerpt below represents the condition.

*Hingga akhirnya datang sepasang pemulung tua, dengan gerobak sampah, dengan panci dan kompor dan kasur lipat, serta tali jemuran. Mereka baru saja terusir dari bantaran sungai, oleh banjir dan bulldozer [2].*

Based on the excerpt, it is visible that Ma Kungkung and Mat Angin are those who leave their first home on a river bank. Typically, living on river banks in Jakarta is living in semi-permanent housing, constructed from plywood with unsuitable condition. It is a certainty for the houses to be flooded or condemned by bulldozers. As the replacement, they try to find a new home and stay in an old slipshod building. The following is the excerpt.

*Demikianlah gedung rongsok itu kemudian berpenghuni, hingga beberapa bulan setelah itu muncul penghuni baru [2].*

It reflects no guarantee for the urbanites' life in Jakarta. This is because they bring nothing when coming to that city. Will or not, they should stay in old slipshod buildings. Tjiptoherijanto reports in his research that in the reality, the habitants of big cities live poorly and some of them stay in slummed areas and settlements [14].

#### I. Criminality

Urban criminality in *O* the novel is pictured in a road coast at the city. The lines below describe it.

*Turun dari bis di satu perempatan jalan, setelah memperoleh beberapa recehan dari penumpang, dua orang preman menghadang dan memalaknya. [2].*

Criminal actions, to Mansyur is caused by people misbehavior of breaking the rules which at the end leading their way of thinking to reach a particular goal [15]. In this case, criminal actions are performed by two criminals stabbing a girl for taking away her money. Another criminal action is killing somebody for the shake of revenge. The quotation shows the action.

*Satu hari di pinggir jalan, dua preman yang pernah dihajarnya, mengenali gadis ini. Dengan licik, mereka menikamnya dengan clurit dari belakang, tak terselamatkan.[2].*

It takes place once Rosalina meets again the criminals beaten by her earlier. Both of the criminals have a grudge against her, then they kill her. In Kartono's opinion, criminality occurs due to some factors, such as biological, sociological, economic, mental, physical, and personal factors [3]. Based on the plot, criminals personal factor motivates the murder for Rosalina's past action.

#### J. Social Heterogeneity

Social heterogeneity is indicated by many varieties in a region and the competition of area utilization [8]. In *O* the novel, the varieties are demonstrated through characters' behavior staying in the region, all at once running the activities there. The following lines reflect the statements.

*Ada penjual obat yang bermain-main dengan ular sanca dan ular kobra, tapi ia tak memiliki monyet. Sudah jelas itu bukan sirkus topeng monyet. Ada gerobak yang ditarik dengan kuda, sudah jelas itu juga bukan sirkus monyet. Ada orang membawa sangkar dan di dalamnya ada seekor burung yang terus bernyanyi. Bukan Di belakang pasar, sekelompok orang mengelilingi dua ekor ayam jago yang saling menyerang dengan taji di kaki mereka [2].*

The event occurs in a market visited by *O*. The heterogeneity is indicated by various activities run by people, utilizing the market as the basis of their activities. This is corroborated by Lan's findings asserting that "...heterogeneity is a useful concept in order to understand the relationship between groups that together construct Indonesian society, because the relationship is not only based on the size of the

groups involved, but also by group variation” [16]. The quotation signs a phenomenon that in a market, people activities with different characters and background happen. It is a place where a medicine seller with his rice field-python snake, carriage, people performing birds’ skill to sing, people playing gamecock, even crazy people, are mentioned.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

*O* the novel reflects the reality happening now in Jakarta. The characters reflection in urbanization phenomena, criminality, poverty, social gap, informal profession, apathy, and materialistic life style are some portraits of another side urbanites life in Jakarta. Additionally, the findings of neglected areas phenomenon, improper housing and social heterogeneity also represent the urban life condition in Jakarta. Either the setting or the society condition portrays life complexity of urban areas in Jakarta.

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