



The Marginalized Communities Life in the Drama Script *Mega-Mega* by Arifin C. Noer: A Sociological Study of Swingewood Literature

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of the lives of marginalized groups depicted in the drama script *Mega-Mega* by Arifin C. Noer, by applying the theoretical framework of the sociology of literature developed by Alan Swingewood. Specifically, this study attempts to describe the portrait of the lives of marginalized groups while examining the socio-economic conditions reflected in the literary work. The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach supported by content analysis techniques, with data sources in the form of fragments of words, sentences, and dialogues in the script that are relevant to the theme of marginality. The research findings reveal that the *Mega-Mega* script represents the bitter reality of marginalized groups who are shackled by structural poverty, minimal access to welfare, and the erosion of their self-esteem in an unequal social structure. Within the framework of Swingewood's sociology of literature, this work is positioned as an authentic record of social reality that also functions as a vehicle for criticism of systems that do not side with small communities. This research is expected to enrich the treasury of sociological studies of literature, especially in the realm of analyzing works that carry the themes of poverty and social marginalization.

Keywords: marginalized communities life, drama script, sociology study

Kehidupan Masyarakat Marginal dalam Naskah Drama *Mega-Mega* Karya Arifin C. Noer: Kajian Sosiologi Sastra Swingewood

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis representasi kehidupan kelompok masyarakat terpinggirkan yang tergambar dalam naskah drama *Mega-Mega* karya Arifin C. Noer, dengan menerapkan kerangka teori sosiologi sastra yang dikembangkan oleh Alan Swingewood. Secara khusus, penelitian ini berupaya mendeskripsikan potret kehidupan kaum marginal sekaligus menelaah kondisi sosial-ekonomi yang terefleksi dalam karya sastra tersebut. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif yang didukung oleh teknik analisis isi, dengan sumber data berupa penggalan kata, kalimat, maupun dialog dalam naskah yang relevan dengan tema marginalitas. Data dikumpulkan melalui teknik baca dan catat, kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan pembacaan teks secara menyeluruh, klasifikasi data, pendeskripsian hasil analisis, interpretasi data, serta penarikan simpulan. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa naskah *Mega-Mega* merepresentasikan realitas pahit kaum terpinggirkan yang terbelenggu oleh kemiskinan struktural, minimnya akses terhadap kesejahteraan, serta tergerusnya harga diri mereka dalam struktur sosial yang timpang. Dalam bingkai sosiologi sastra Swingewood, karya ini diposisikan sebagai rekaman otentik realitas sosial yang sekaligus berfungsi sebagai wahana kritik terhadap sistem yang tidak berpihak kepada masyarakat kecil. Penelitian ini diharapkan mampu memperkaya khazanah kajian sosiologi sastra, terutama dalam ranah analisis karya-karya yang mengusung tema kemiskinan dan keterpinggiran sosial. Selain itu, penelitian ini diharapkan dapat menjadi rujukan bagi pengajaran sastra di tingkat pendidikan tinggi, khususnya dalam memahami keterkaitan antara karya sastra dengan realitas sosial masyarakat.

Kata kunci: kehidupan masyarakat marginal, naskah drama, kajian sosiologi sastra

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3635

INTRODUCTION

Marginalized communities are social groups that are systematically excluded from the mainstream of economic, political, and cultural life. They live in spaces beyond the reach of state facilities and protections, facing structural poverty that is not merely a matter of material deprivation but also a result of unequal access to education, health care, and decent work (Nugroho et al., 2024: 3).

In many social studies, the poverty experienced by marginalized groups is understood as a product of unequal power relations, in which certain groups are consistently positioned on the periphery of the social structure without the power to change their status (Nugroho et al., 2024:4). These conditions give rise to distinctive patterns of life: dependence on the informal sector, substandard housing, and uncertainty that is an inseparable part of their daily lives.

Marginality as a social phenomenon not only exists in real life but has also become a rich source of inspiration for the world of literature. Drama, as one form of literary work, often features marginalized people as main characters who voice sharp criticism of various forms of social inequality. From this perspective, literature fulfills a function that goes far beyond mere entertainment; it serves as both a medium for documentation and a form of resistance against unjust social conditions (Lusiana, 2023:70). Arifin C. Noer is one of Indonesia's most tenacious and consistent playwrights in bringing these themes to the stage. Through his play titled *Mega-Mega*, he positions the homeless and the poor as protagonists imbued with humanistic values, while refusing to reduce their existence to mere symbols of suffering (Azzahrah et al., 2026:68).

To systematically examine the social realities embedded in literary works, an approach is needed that can bridge the text with its social context. Alan Swingewood's sociological approach to literature offers a relevant analytical framework for this purpose. Swingewood views literary works as

sociocultural documents that connect the fictional characters within the text to the real social conditions created by the author based on the context of their creation (Wahyudi, 2013:56).

Wahdiyanti (2025:92) argues that Alan Swingewood's sociological theory of literature is based on three key concepts: literary works as reflections of their era; the creative process influenced by the author's social conditions; and literary works as sociocultural documents of a society. Swingewood divides his approach into three aspects of analysis, all of which center on the literary text itself. The first aspect is social context, which examines how the social background and the circumstances of the era are manifested in the development of characters, dialogue, and the conditions depicted in the work. The second aspect is literature as a reflection of society, in which literary works are viewed as direct representations of various realities of social life, class conflict, poverty, and interpersonal relationships within society. The third aspect is social function, namely an examination of the role and contribution of literary works to society whether they serve merely as entertainment, or also function as a form of criticism and an instrument of social change (Wahyudi, 2013:57). These three aspects form the foundation for analyzing the portrayal of marginalized communities in the play *Mega-Mega*.

The ability to read the script of the play *Mega-Mega* not only as an aesthetic text but also as a social document that both records and challenges the reality of life for marginalized groups during that era. Swingewood (as cited in Lusiana 2023:70) asserts that Swingewood's sociological approach to literature views literary works as a medium for rewriting social facts within society, thereby enabling this approach to uncover the social dimensions hidden behind the text in greater depth. This aligns with the findings of (Wahyudi 2013:57) that the concept of literature as a social reflection within Swingewood's framework positions literary works as a direct reflection of social conflicts,



kinship relationships, and societal dynamics occurring in real life.

Swingewood's sociological approach to literature has been widely applied in Indonesian literary studies and has proven capable of revealing the social dimensions contained within texts. (Nensilanti 2023:157) emphasizes that Swingewood's sociological approach to literature is capable of identifying the social groups represented by the author while also describing the author's perspective as an individual subject rather than merely a collective representation. Meanwhile, (Azzahrah et al. 2026:68) point out that modern Indonesian drama is rich in reflections of the social upheavals within its society, making the sociological approach one of the most productive methods for analyzing major works.

Based on the background outlined above, this study focuses on the lives of marginalized communities as viewed through the lens of social context, reflections of life, and social functions in Arifin C. Noer's play *Mega-Mega*.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, an approach that presents data in the form of words, sentences, narratives, and images (Ramdhan, 2021:2; Razak, 2017:176). This method was applied to describe the lives of marginalized communities in Arifin C. Noer's play *Mega-Mega* through Ian Watt's sociological approach to literature. The data source for this study is Arifin C. Noer's play *Mega-Mega*. The approach used is a literature review, which re-examines previous findings related to the research topic along with their explanations (Jailan, 2024:80). The research data consists of quotations, dialogues, and sentences that depict the lives of marginalized communities, covering social conditions, economic conditions, and the patterns of relationships among characters in the play.

Data collection was conducted through reading and note-taking. Meanwhile, data analysis was carried out in several stages: a comprehensive

reading of the text, data classification, analysis based on Ian Watt's sociological theory of literature, description of the analysis results, data interpretation, and drawing conclusions regarding the portrayal of marginalized communities in the play's script.

RESULTS

1. The Lives of Marginalized Communities as Viewed Through the Social Context in the Play *Mega-Mega* by Arifin C. Noer

Linguistically, the word "marginal" in Indonesian refers to something located on the periphery or edge. When this concept is applied to social reality, marginalized communities can be understood as groups left behind by the tide of progress and modernization. They are part of a community that lives within social structures, yet their existence is actually excluded from the general social order (Sandora, 2019:198).

Data 1

Mae : "We're the losers. We don't have a home, we don't have jobs."

Retno : "But we're still alive, Mae." (Noer, 1999:15)

This quote illustrates the condition of marginalized people who feel powerless in social life. The word "losers" indicates that they occupy a lower position in the social structure. The characters in the play live in poverty, lack steady employment, and have lost the opportunity to lead a decent life.

Data 2

Mae : "This city is too cruel to the poor."

Panut : "Only the strong survive." (Noer, 1999:48)

These quotes reveal a strong social critique of city life. The city is portrayed as an unwelcoming place for the poor because it benefits only certain groups.

Data 3

Hamung : “Ordinary people like us can only wait for fate.”

Retno : “Our fate won’t change if we keep living like this.” (Noer, 1999:37)

This quote illustrates the resigned attitude of marginalized communities toward their living conditions. They feel powerless to change their lives because they are constrained by economic and social conditions.

2. A Reflection of Marginalized Communities in Arifin C. Noe’s Play *Mega-Mega*

The portrayal of marginalized communities in this play is vividly reflected through a depiction of pervasive poverty. Poverty in this play encompasses both material aspects including basic daily needs such as clothing, food, shelter, healthcare, and education and social aspects, such as social exclusion, dependency, and the inability to participate in society.

Data 1

Mae : “How many times have I told you, Mae? Don’t try to pick pockets. It’s not right.”

Panut : “I don’t care whether it’s right or wrong. It’s just these hands. Damn it. I’ve been practicing for half a year, but I’ve never succeeded even once. How can I not be frustrated?” (Noer, 1999:73)

This excerpt reflects the lives of marginalized communities trapped in structural poverty, which drives individuals to commit illegal acts to meet their basic needs. The character Panut is portrayed as no longer caring about what is right or wrong because such severe economic pressure has eroded his sense of morality.

Data 2

“Mae’s mat. I think it would be so nice to sleep in the middle of the town square on this moonlit night.” (Noer, 1999:74)

This quote reflects the lives of marginalized people who are forced to live in public spaces without adequate housing. The image of a “shabby mat” and sleeping in the town square serves as a tangible symbol of the economic hardships faced by the characters in the play.

Data 3

“Ever since I was a young girl, I’ve longed to give birth to a son... That child was sick. Starving. He died. Since then, I’ve been driven nearly mad by feelings of disappointment and frustration.” (Noer, 1999:74)

This quote reflects the lives of marginalized communities through the story of Retno’s suffering as a poor woman who lost her child to starvation. This situation illustrates just how harsh life is for marginalized people, who are unable to provide even adequate food and medical care for their own family members.

3. The Lives of Marginalized Communities as Viewed Through the Social Function in Arifin C. Noer’s Play *Mega-Mega*

The social function of literature refers to the extent to which literary values relate to social values. In this context, three points must be considered: the extreme viewpoint of the Romantics, who regard literature as being on the same level as the works of priests or prophets. Therefore, literature must serve as a reformer and revolutionary; literature as mere entertainment; and literature must teach something in an entertaining way.

Data 1

Mae : “Sleeping on the sidewalk, eating leftovers.”

Panut : “The important thing is that our stomachs are full.” (Noer, 1999:84)

This quote illustrates the spirit of survival among marginalized communities amidst the various hardships they face. The characters in the



play do not lead decent lives, but they continue to strive to live with great resilience.

Data 2

Hamung: "The rich are getting richer."

Retno : "Meanwhile, we're running out of everything." (Noer, 1999: 93)

This quote highlights the social inequality between the wealthy and the poor. The wealthy are portrayed as gaining more power and prosperity, while the poor are sinking deeper into economic hardship.

Data 3

Retno : "After Eating, Of Course We Have To Think About Clothes."

Hamung : "You're So Quick-Witted."

Koyal : "Yes, to be properly presentable, we must cover our bodies with dazzling clothes so that everything is neatly concealed." (Noer, 1999: 2)

Through this excerpt from the dialogue, the author attempts to portray the attitudes of the rulers, who tend to prioritize their personal interests above all else. They are depicted as living in excessive luxury enjoying unlimited food, wearing expensive clothes, and spending their days in pleasure and extravagance. Ironically, all of this takes place amidst the bitter reality that the common people are still struggling hard to meet even their most basic daily needs.

DISCUSSION

The Lives of Marginalized Communities as Seen Through the Social Context in Arifin C. Noer's Play Mega-Mega

The implementation of social policies among marginalized communities in Indonesia is constantly faced with various complex and intractable obstacles. Among the factors determining the success of these policies, active citizen participation plays a highly strategic role. Mahayani (in Riyanto, 2023:3) emphasizes that

direct community involvement is the primary driver in ensuring that government-designed social programs can be implemented effectively. However, efforts to achieve such participation are still hampered by several fundamental issues, namely a lack of public awareness regarding the importance of their involvement, differing perceptions and interests among stakeholders, as well as limited resources and a lack of commitment and support from the government.

In the social dimension, children growing up in dysfunctional families or unsupportive living environments tend to face obstacles in achieving a better future. These adverse environmental conditions directly or indirectly hinder their potential and life opportunities in the future (Sandora, 2019:201).

In the social context of his work, Arifin C. Noer portrays the social reality of urban society, which is rife with inequality. The author demonstrates that the underprivileged are often the victims of urban development and modernization. They lack access to social welfare and thus feel marginalized from social life. Through his plays, Arifin C. Noer shows that urban modernization and development do not always bring about social welfare. On the contrary, marginalized communities are pushed even further to the margins. They live amid fierce economic competition and a lack of social protection. This quote reflects the relationship between literary works and social reality. The author depicts how the underprivileged often live under social pressures that rob them of hope. This serves as a critique of a social system that fails to provide equal opportunities to all segments of society.

The identified factors triggering social conflict include inequality among individuals, cultural gaps, clashes of interest, and the dynamics of social change, with inequality among individuals being the most dominant factor (Harummi, 2024:83). This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that all the characters in the play lack permanent housing and depend on precarious work for their livelihoods ranging from begging to extreme acts

such as Retno, who is forced into sex work, and Panut, who turns to theft a stark reflection of the government's failure to prioritize addressing the plight of those without decent employment.

A Reflection of Marginalized Communities in Arifin C. Noe's Play Mega-Mega

According to Azzahrah et al. (2026: 73), social conflict in literary works serves as a form of criticism directed at various social issues that reflect the realities of people's lives during that era. Through these conflicts, the author highlights various conditions of inequality and injustice, ranging from poverty, gender disparities, the negative stigmas society attaches to certain individuals, the psychological pressures experienced by the characters, to their shattered mental states.

These conditions demonstrate how the poverty experienced by marginalized communities is not merely a matter of material deprivation but also touches upon the moral and psychological dimensions of their lives. According to Azzahrah et al. (2026:73), poverty in the play Mega-Mega forces its characters to make a living by any means necessary including pickpocketing, stealing, and begging as a reflection of the lives of marginalized communities who lack access to a decent standard of living. Furthermore, the poverty they experience is structural in nature not the result of personal laziness, but rather due to a social system that does not favor the common people, thereby trapping them in an endless cycle of poverty.

According to (Azzahrah et al. 2026:74), this quote reflects deeply concerning economic constraints, where marginalized communities cannot afford adequate shelter and thus rely solely on public facilities as their living spaces. This paints a portrait of the lives of the urban poor who are excluded from a decent social life. Through the play Mega-Mega, it is depicted that the pressures of poverty experienced by marginalized groups are not merely economic in nature but also strip them of their dignity and humanity.

According to (Azzahrah et al. 2026:75), this quote reveals just how acute poverty is forcing families to endure tragic losses because they cannot meet their basic needs. This proves that poverty among marginalized communities directly threatens their very survival. Moreover, Retno's suffering illustrates the double burden borne by poor women: economic poverty coupled with psychological trauma resulting from the lack of social protection and welfare.

The Lives of Marginalized Communities as Viewed Through the Social Function in Arifin C. Noer's Play Mega-Mega

According to Sahrani (2018:5), the social function of literature relates to the extent to which the values in literary works are connected to social values in society. In this context, there are three perspectives to consider: first, the extreme view of the Romantics, who equate literature with the work of a priest or prophet, expecting literature to serve as an agent of renewal and social change; second, the view that positions literature solely as a means of entertainment; and third, the view that literature should convey specific messages or values through entertaining means.

Through the conversation between Mae and Panut, the author aims to highlight the human dignity possessed by marginalized people. Although they live in poverty, they still hold onto hope and the will to survive. This demonstrates that even the underprivileged have their own struggles and maintain their dignity as human beings. The social function of literature in this excerpt is to foster the reader's empathy toward the lives of marginalized communities. The play Mega-Mega teaches that every human being including the poor and the marginalized possesses inherent human dignity that must be respected. Furthermore, this excerpt demonstrates that literature can impart moral lessons to society. Readers are invited to understand the daily struggles of the underprivileged and to cultivate a sense of compassion and social solidarity toward their fellow human beings.



Furthermore, in the conversation between Hamung and Retno, the author critiques a social system that fails to provide justice for all members of society. City life benefits certain groups, while the working class continues to face hardships. The social function of the play in this excerpt is to serve as a tool for social criticism of the injustices occurring in society. The author uses literature to give voice to marginalized groups who have long been overlooked. Furthermore, this excerpt also demonstrates that poverty is not caused solely by individual factors but also by unbalanced social and economic conditions. Thus, the play Mega-Mega serves to raise public awareness of the importance of social justice and concern for the common people.

Meanwhile, in the conversation between Retno, Hamung, and Koyang, they discuss food and clothing. At first glance, this dialogue appears simple and lighthearted, but upon closer examination, it contains a rather sharp social critique. When Retno states that after eating one must immediately think about clothing, the author implicitly depicts the mindset of a group whose lives revolve solely around the fulfillment of personal desires. This mindset reflects a consumerist attitude that is far removed from any concern for the social conditions around them. Meanwhile, Hamung's response praising Retno's quick wit further reinforces the impression that such a perspective is considered normal and even admired within their circle.

When examined through the various social critiques both explicit and implicit contained within it, this play deserves to be called a truly exceptional work of literature. The author has proven capable of capturing various social phenomena occurring in society with such sharpness and precision, then reworking them into subtle satires that are skillfully woven throughout the play (Sahrani 2018:5). The central theme issues of social life that are deeply intertwined with the daily realities of the poor

and marginalized communities in the city of Yogyakarta is more than sufficient to serve as both a reflection and a critique of the devastating impact of the economic crisis that struck in 1967, a dark period that plunged the common people into profound suffering.

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