

Film Adaptation of Eka Kurniawan's Short Story Kandang Babi: Imagining Student Life in Post-Reformation Era and Criticism Towards University Apparatus in Indonesia

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Abstract. This article unpacks how the short film adaptation *Kandang Babi*, based on the short story with the same title by Eka Kurniawan, boldly represents the life of students and their criticism towards the university apparatus in Post-Reformation Indonesia. Furthermore, because the filmmakers of *Kandang Babi* are students, this essay also investigates how their process of translating the short story *Kandang Babi* into the film relates to their own experiences and critical perspectives on campus. The research involves the textual analysis of both the film and the short story. Moreover, to explore the motivation and context of making the film adaptation *Kandang Babi*, I interviewed the student filmmakers and the film adaptation lecturer from the State University of Surabaya. The result shows that the film depicts a poor student, Edi Idiot, who survives by staying in the abandoned warehouse within the campus. However, he articulates voices of resistance toward campus policy and questions sensitive issues such as sexual harassment on campus. The students involved in making this film, both directors and actors, are aware of their college environment and their role in criticising university policies.

Keywords: Film Adaptation, Short Story, *Kandang Babi*, Student life, University Apparatus

1 Introduction

Eka Kurniawan's collection of short stories has proven to be compelling materials for short film adaptations. Wregas Bhanuteja, a young director, made a short film based on Eka Kurniawan's short story titled *Tak Ada Orang Gila di Kota Ini* (No One is Crazy in This Town) in 2019. This film has been chosen to participate at the Busan International Film Festival. Eka Kurniawan's another short story *Kandang Babi* (Pigsty) which depicts the life of the students in the post-reformation era, was turned into a film in 2021 by the students at the State University of Surabaya [1]. This short film has received over a thousand views since its launch on YouTube in June 2021.

The film adaptation of *Kandang Babi* was made for a class project related to a course, namely film adaptation, at the State University of Surabaya Indonesia. The director, scriptwriter, and actors are all students, and they all relate their position, identity, and experiences as students to the films they make. This film production was not made for commercial purposes, but for educational purposes, particularly to encourage the students to practice making a film

adaptation. However, despite merely perceiving the filmmaking as educational and non-commercial, the students making the film are brave to express thoughts and criticism. Achmad Fauzi, the scriptwriter of the film *Kandang Babi*, claimed that the short story *Kandang Babi* has exciting and critical issues related to campus policies towards students and problems at university. He and his friends involved in filmmaking hope that the film can be a medium in criticising campus leaders and lecturers (Personal Communication, June 1 2021, and October 8 2021). According to Ahmad Fauzi's explanation, it can be assumed that the film adaptation *Kandang Babi* is used as a medium to represent the students' voices toward the issues interweaving with their lives and position on the campus. In this context, the student filmmakers hope that the film will serve as a critical input as criticism for academics, including faculty and university leaders.

The university is a non-vacuum space of power relations. Campus elites are often an extension of government power that carries out the interests of implementing government policies and programs [2][3]. Campus rulers such as the rector and dean have power over the campus people, such as students. According to Foucault, as cited by Gordon [4], there is no power nexus without resistance. Critical and marginal students whom university officials expel because they do not follow university regulations and are perceived to be disrupting the campus may engage in resistance. Through the film *Kandang Babi*, students attempt to critique university power and negotiate their identities as agents of change within academic society.

Films frequently reflect and critique many societal issues. The filmmakers wish to demonstrate their concern for a variety of issues faced by the community. Nascimento [5] asserts that films can encapsulate certain social tendencies and provide a valid representation of contemporary social connections and practices. In the film *Kandang Babi*, the nexus between campus authorities and students illustrates how relationships between members of a community with unequal power can descend into conflict; The arbitrary power of the dean of the college is challenged while also being controlled by the students. In this case, film, as Chapman said [6], can be a tool of social control.

The students' decision to bring *Kandang Babi* into the short film demonstrates their daring and idealism, which is in line with the spirit of freedom of expression in the post-reformation era in Indonesia. During the New Order regime, critical expression addressed to the ruler was strictly controlled and even prohibited. Under Suharto Regime, a film (released in 1997) entitled *Yang Muda Yang Bercinta* was banned because the film depicts students who criticise the government and educational institutions. Eka Kurniawan's short story that describes the lives of poor students who are marginalised and ignored by the campus leadership inspires the State University of Surabaya students to adapt it in a short film.

Many researchers have carried out studies on film adaptation in Indonesia, such as Woodrich [6], who focused on the film adaptation of the novels in the Dutch East Indies, and Indra [7], who investigated film adaptation of the novel *Ronggeng Dukuh Peruk*. Meanwhile, Abidin et al. [8] examined the historical development of film adaptation of novels from 1926 to 2018. Moreover, Fajar [9] scrutinised the adaptation of some Indonesian religious novels into films. There was research on the film adaptation of Eka Kurniawan's short story, but its focus was on the adaptation of the short story to the play [10]. Based on these previous studies, it can be figured out that researchers rarely focus on investigating the adaptation of Indonesian short stories to short movies. Moreover, the study of the films which portray students' resistance toward university apparatus in Indonesia has not been carried out.

This article attempts to narrow the above gap by examining how the short film adapted from the short story represents students' lives on campus and their resistance towards the university apparatus. Furthermore, as the students made the film, this essay will also explore

how their process of adapting the short story *Kandang Babi* reflects their awareness as an intellectual group who must have critical thoughts towards their campus environment. This article is expected to contribute to the study of short film adaptation based on short stories in Indonesia, especially those that take the theme of the roles of students in critiquing various problems on campus and in the world of education on a broader scale.

2 Research Method

This research is a textual study which is combined with interviews. As stated by Corrigan [11], the primary source in film research is the film. However, considering that the source is a film adaptation of a short story, the adapted short story is also used. Consequently, adaptation studies require an interdisciplinary perspective [12]. The primary data was obtained from these two main sources and interviews with the film adaptation makers. The analysis was carried out descriptively by interpreting the film adaptation data and the short story *Kandang Babi*. The data obtained from interviews were used to answer questions related to making the adaptation film *Kandang Babi*.

3 Finding and Discussion

3.1 The Life of Students

The short film *Kandang Babi* depicts Edi Idiot, a poor and marginal student who depends on on-campus facilities. He comes from a low-income family. Therefore he cannot afford a private apartment or boarding home. Edi Idiot's poverty is reflected in the shabby clothes he wears. In terms of physical features, intellectual capacity, and personality, the portrayal of Edi Idiot in the film is quite like the narrative made by Eka Kurniawan in the short story. In the film, Edi Idiot is played by a student, M. Imam Lukman Munthoha, who physically has the same characteristics as Edi Idiot, who has long curly hair. Therefore, the choice of the film director to ask M. Imam Lukman to play Edi Idiot was very appropriate. As a result, M. Imam Lukman was able to bring the character of Edi Idiot to life as described in Eka Kurniawan's short story. However, Edi Idiot in the short film *Kandang Babi* looks more courageous in expressing opinions and protests to the campus apparatus.

Edi Idiot occupies an empty, messy, and abandoned room that functions as a warehouse in one of the campus buildings. In that place, he often invites his friends and even loves his girlfriend. On the one hand, the space occupied by Edi Idiot reflects Edi's restricted life, while on the other hand, it describes Edi's freedom. Edi Idiot can still grin when holding the blanket given to him by his beloved in a messy and untidy environment, as shown in figure 1. Even though he lives in a room that is not a bedroom, he still strives for happiness.



Fig. 1. Edi Idiot was in one of the campus rooms that he used to sleep every day

Edi Idiot tries to get fun and freedom on campus in his way, which is actually against campus rules. For example, in several campuses in Indonesia in the post-reform era, students were forbidden to spend the night on campus [13][14]. However, students like Edi Idiot insist on staying on campus because he does not have the money to pay for an off-campus flat. As a result, he uses the campus area as a dwelling without authorising the faculty leader.

Edi Idiot's inability financially also causes him to be unable to live in prosperity. When he needed to eat in the campus cafeteria, he could not pay, so he had to go into debt. The phenomenon of students like Edi Idiot on campus is ironic because the campus should provide financial assistance or provide solutions for Edi Idiot and other poor students. A food seller often assists Edi Idiot in the campus cafeteria named 'Mbak Nur'. Edi often eats at Mbak Nur's simple cafeteria using debt. *Kandang Babi* depicts the close relationship between poor students and Mbak Nur. Even Mbak Nur often confides in personal problems with Edi Idiot.



Fig. 2. The closeness between Edi Idiot and Mbak Nur, the owner of one of the simple cafeterias on campus.

Edi Idiot is also depicted consuming cheap food and drinks in the picture above. Edi Idiot's life on campus is thus far from the impression of a glamorous lifestyle. From the beginning to the end of the film, Edi Idiot only consumes cheap food such as fried tempeh, tofu, and instant noodles. They also drink just plain black coffee. Edi's poverty has forced him to go into debt and survive by entertaining motorists and car drivers at red lights to get money from motorists. Asking for money at a red light by entertaining people who cross the street is not the right thing. However, Edi does it as he has no other option because he has no money to eat.



Fig. 3. Edi Idiot is entertaining car drivers and motorcycle riders at a red light

The short film *Kandang Babi* presents something different from the short story adapted. In the film, Edi Idiot is depicted looking for money outside the campus, which is not narrated in the short story. By presenting these two spaces, the campus and the red light, this film seems to portray a poor student who does not get financial support from the campus and becomes a busker at a red light. Because the campus and university apparatus does not pay attention to Edi Idiot, the traffic light area becomes a location for him to seek help.

3.2 Criticism Toward Campus Apparatus

Since the early scene of the film, the director describes the students, Edi Idiot and his friends, tending to regard their faculty leader, the dean, as a person who is less respected. The attitude of these students was seen when the dean passed the campus cafeteria. The students, including Edi, greeted the dean with intonations that tended to be joking and dismissive. Through the medium shot technique, the audience could see Edi Idiot and his friends greeting the Dean and the Dean looking at the students with a cynical look, which gave the impression of dislike, as shown in fig. 4.

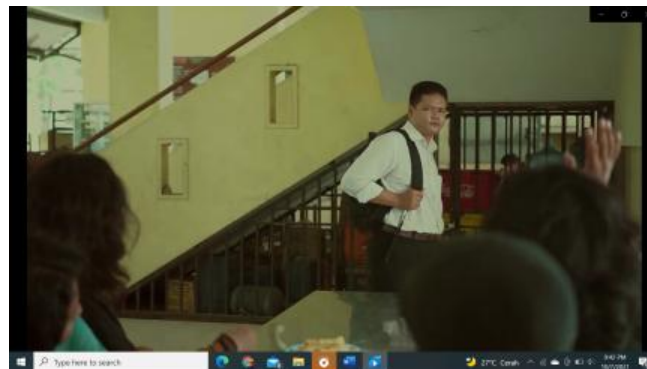


Fig. 4. The dean passed in front of Edi Idiot and his friends

The dean's gaze and the student's attitude to the dean in the figure above shows a less harmonious relationship. The dean who does not want to return students' greetings shows his reluctance to build good relationships. The description of the dean's attitude that is emphasised

in the film *Kandang Babi* indicates how the filmmaker builds the image of the dean's leadership that is not populist. Meanwhile, the attitude of the students who did not respect the campus leadership indicated an antipathy attitude towards the power of the campus apparatus.

The scene of Edi Idiot's meeting with his friends and the dean above is then followed by a scene in which Edi Idiot seduces a cute student who is passing by. Then Edi Idiot asked his friends about cases of sexual harassment that occurred on campus. What Edi Idiot did to female students who passed by was also inappropriate. Edi's actions contradict his enthusiasm for criticising sexual harassment cases. Regarding cases that should not have happened in educational institutions such as universities, a friend of Edi Idiot said, "I heard that the Head of Department did not follow up on this. Usually, that image must be saved again." (Minutes: 03.46-03.53) Then another Edi Idiot's friend chimed in, "Hah, image, image, Bullshit! Campus should be a safe place for anyone, especially female student. The image from the outside is good, safe and prosperous, harmonious, peaceful, happy, but when people enter (the campus), the female students here are afraid of being the next victim. (Minutes: 03.54-04.16). This statement shows criticism of the university apparatus for not handling cases of sexual harassment experienced by female students. Students hope that campuses can be free from acts of harassment that make the students frightened.

The filmmaker raised the issue of sexual harassment in the short film *Kandang Babi* to respond to cases of sexual harassment in universities in Indonesia in recent years. Ahmad Fauzi, the scriptwriter of the film adaptation *Kandang Babi*, included sexual harassment in the film because Fauzi and his friends involved in making the film got information and data about sexual harassment from a lecturer on female students. Fauzi wanted to criticise the campus apparatus for not following up on the case. (Personal Communication, October 8, 2021) The sexual harassment issue is not actually told in Eka Kurniawan short story. Thus, the filmmaker uses his creativity and critical notion to create a new narrative. They also attempt to contextualise Eka Kurniawan's short story with the current actual condition at the university. In this case, the filmmaker must consider creating the actuality of the film adaptation which is based on the past literary work so that it can give impact to the spectators living in contemporary era [15]. However, the filmmaker still tries to raise issues in the prominent place, namely the campus, and being the primary setting in Eka Kurniawan's short story. The portrayal of the actual issue of sexual harassment and the students' resistance toward the university apparatus suggest the nexus of the present and past phenomenon in Indonesia.

In addition to criticism of cases of sexual harassment on campus, the film *Kandang Babi* also depicts criticism of the power of campus officials in implementing policies and decisions on student life. This criticism is depicted in several scenes, such as when the Campus Security guard locked the room occupied by Edi Idiot so that he could no longer sleep in it. However, instead of providing solutions and attention to Edi Idiot, the campus security immediately closed Edi Idiot's access to use the room facilities.



Fig. 5. A campus security staff argues with Edi Idiot about locking the door of the room where Edi usually sleeps

In figure 5 above, the security man firmly tells Edi Idiot that the room belongs to the faculty that Edi cannot use to stay. Meanwhile, Edi insisted he felt entitled to take advantage of the neglected room. The picture taken with the medium shot above is interesting because the security guy's position is higher than Edi Idiot's. This picture arrangement shows the position of the security guy, who is stronger than the position of Edi Idiot. Edi Idiot could only verbally fight against the security guy the dean ordered to close the room. Edi Idiot was finally powerless to face the power of campus officials. He then brought his belongings removed from the room by campus security.

The visualisation of the warehouse occupied by Edi Idiot implicitly reflects the filmmaker's criticism of campus leaders who cannot properly use the space on campus. The campus warehouse, which should be used to store things in a well-organised and well-organised way, actually looks messy. This condition indicates that the room management on campus is not handled professionally. Meanwhile, the phenomenon of student Edi Idiot, who is abandoned on campus and does not have enough money to live, shows the campus's lack of attention to poor female students like him. After the room where Edi Idiot usually sleeps is locked, he must move to another place such as in front of the campus stadium, sleeping outside at night.

Edi Idiot finally dared to meet the dean to protest the locking of the warehouse by the faculty. The locks symbolise how campus officials use their power to prevent a poor student from using it as a residence. The dean reasoned that the faculty was carrying out accreditation which forced the campus leadership to expel students such as Edi Idiot and his friends who had been studying for a long time but did not graduate. For the dean, the existence of Edi Idiot and Edi's friends is only a parasite for the campus (minutes 30.07-30.32) The dean's statement shows his indifference to the fate of Edi and his friends. The dean only thinks about building the campus image through accreditation which represents the government policy but is reluctant to give attention and solutions to poor students.

Edi not only questioned the dean's prohibition of living in empty warehouses on campus, but he also criticised the new student orientation model and sexual harassment by lecturers on campus. Edi Idiot's courage in conveying this criticism reflects the students' enthusiasm for seeing various problems. As a film adaptation based on a short story in the post-reform era, the film *Kandang Babi* presents a student figure who dares to voice his aspirations and protest to the campus authorities.

3.3 The Filmmakers' Adaptation to The Short Story

The filmmaker adapting literary works encounters challenges to provide the readers with a convincing image of the texts and, at the same time, images for the new spectators [16]. Consequently, filmmakers should take the process of adaptation into account. For example, before deciding to choose the short story, Fauzi said that the team had discussed it; some of the current issues related to university life are taken into account (Personal Communication, 1 Juni 2021). Thus, the process of selecting and adapting the short story consider both narrative and contextual elements. By so doing, he is ready to create motion pictures based on the text. Furthermore, the consideration indicates that the students are aware of and are interested in the problems about the life of students narrated by Eka Kurniawan.

The addition of several scenes related to student protests over sexual harassment cases and their criticism of the dean, which is not actually in the film, according to Ahmad Fauzi, was driven by the students' anxiety and anger; At first, they were hesitant to include these issues because they were afraid that the campus apparatus would not like such an image. However, they ended up putting it in any way. Ahmad Fauzi and the students involved in making the film hoped that the lecturers would watch the film. But in reality, the biggest audience was students (Personal Information, October 8 2021)

Meanwhile, the filmmaking process goes through several stages. Because making this film is part of a class project on "Film Adaptation", the students were given materials about film adaptation by their lecturer, Dr. Ririe Rengganis, in the class. These materials are essential to give the students basic knowledge about the film adaptation. At the film production stage, primarily related to the actors' acting, Dr Ririe Rengganis (Personal Communication, September 5 2021) said their acting skills have been trained since they took drama courses in the previous semester. The students also practise independently in the poetry class, which trains them to appreciate and animate poetry. Moreover, at the time of rehearsal, students also get direction and input from lecturers who master acting techniques (from ballet).

4 Conclusion

The film *Kandang Babi* represent the lives of poor students who did not receive attention and assistance from the campus apparatus. A poor student who is described by a figure named Edi Idiot tries to ask for help and support from the campus so that he can live in a space in the campus environment. Unfortunately, the dean forbade poor students like Edi to stay on campus. This action made Edi criticise and protest. According to Edi, the campus should support poor students like him and allow them to live in spaces, such as campus warehouses, which are empty and neglected. The criticism levelled by the students against the campus leadership was also related to cases of sexual harassment allegedly committed by lecturers on campus.

The adaptation of the short story *Kandang Babi* into a film made by the students made them feel close to the issues of student life and the conflicts they faced with the campus apparatus. They can experience the life of the character Edi Idiot and express their anxiety about various issues and cases on campus.

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