

Alienation in Albert Camus' *the Stranger*

M Adam Abdullah, Suryo Tri Saksono
Universitas Trunojoyo Madura

ABSTRACT

The deaths that happened during the world wars of the twentieth century caused people's feelings of fear and despair. Many people no longer believe in God. This led to rebellion in the system of society. The existentialists try to answer society's anxieties by looking for meaning for human existence. This phenomenon also influenced literary works of that era. The Stranger novel was chosen as the object of research because Meursault as the main character describes the existentialist philosophy in social life.

The literary review used in this research is the concept of character and characteristics and Sartre's theory of existentialism such as existence precedes essence, radical freedom, bad faith, alienation, and death. The design of this research uses qualitative methods. Primary data sources were obtained from *The Stranger* novel by Albert Camus. Data were collected using condensation techniques, data presentation, and verification of conclusions.

The results showed that the character Meursault in *The Stranger* experienced alienation from himself and his society. Meursault's alienation is illustrated by the habits, jobs and responses of other characters to his presence. Meursault also has a tendency to reject the values of his societies. Meursault's radical freedoms made him confused about determining the limits of freedom. Meursault's all kinds of alienation were a form of Camus existentialism.

KEYWORDS: Existentialism, Alienation, The Stranger.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Literature is part of work that cannot be separated from the life of the society where literature was born. Literature and philosophy are different in the focus of their studies. Philosophy studies human concepts and emphasizes the living human, while literature emphasized its study on the character created by the author. However, both of the studies have a close relationship as literature is often made as to the manifestation of philosophy's idea. Even using Anthony Burgess' term, novels are not expected to be didactic but fictional works convey a philosophy of life.

Existentialism could be defined as one of historical convenience. According to Steven Crowell (2017) in his journal, he also noted that existentialism was as much a literary phenomenon as a philosophical one. It was adopted as a self-description by Jean-Paul Sartre through his dissemination of the postwar literary and philosophical output. Jean-Paul Sartre becomes the most iconic and one of the most famous among the existentialist because of his contribution to the existentialist philosophy. Jonathan Webber (2009) in 'Existentialism In Two-Player's points out themes of Sartre's existentialism: existence precedes essence, absolute freedom, the responsibility of choice, anxiety, subjectivity, despair, anxiety, and abandonment or alienation.

Albert Camus is an author who was born between two world wars in the colonized country in Algeria. He was also a journalist, editor, playwright, director, novelist, and author of short stories. But he denied being called a philosopher because he did not write his thought systematically and also opposed systemic philosophy. In his novel, Camus describes absurdism to expose the realization of the meaningless of human life in literary work. Those points are compatible with the existentialism of Sartre that the researcher has cited from Webber above. Although he separated himself from existentialism, he posed one of the best-known existentialist questions in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "there is only one really serious philosophical question that is suicide" (Camus, 1942: 3).

The researcher decided to study Meursault character in *The Stranger* novel as the object of this research because Meursault was depicted the existentialist philosophy in social life. Meursault as the character is described as an honest man, unwilling, and anti-social person

II. LITERARY REVIEW

1. Philosophy and Literature

Philosophy and literature have a close relation. Iris Vidmar (2014) in her journal state literature and philosophy can merged together. Because many literary theme such as freedom of will and determinism also found in philosophy (Vidmar, 2014:8).Some philosophers such as Sartre and Camus uses literature as a medium of their thought. Kitcher also added that sometimes literary works are used to explain any philosophical thought such as Camus did in *The Stranger*. Camus gives an example how absurdism is applied in real life.

2. Character and Characterization

a. Character

Characters can be understood in two contexts. First, character refers to the individuals in the story. Second, character refers to various mixtures of the interests, desires, emotions, and moral principles of these individuals. The main character is the dominant character that can be found in a story that is found in all story events (Stanton, 1965: 33).In a novel, the character is one of the most important elements for developing a story. In a novel, a character is the one who makes the story in a novel alive like a reflection of real life. Characters show certain behaviors such as reactions to the situations contained in the story.

b. Characterization

In literature, characterization is the process of the writer developing characters and creating character images for the audience. In other words, it is the author's way of showing his character through a work of fiction or depicting a character. There are two different approaches in the characterization process, namely direct characterization and indirect characterization (Bennett and Royle, 2004: 65). Direct characterization usually used in novels and indirect characterization model is usually used in films.

3. Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Sartre is the founder of French Existentialism The philosophy of existentialism is a thought that prioritizes authenticity. Sarte states that "conflict is the original meaning of being-for-other" (Sartre, 1952: 386). He also maintains that humans can be authentic or inauthentic. According to Hubert in Zekkour Mohammed's thesis, Sartre expresses his conception of authenticity by "advocating a constant effort to avoid self-deception and bad faith" (Hubert, 2006: 217).

One of the well-known a branch of Sartre's existence is that existence precedes essence. According to Sartre, the first man existed, faced with himself, entered the world, and only then did he define himself (Priest, 2002: 44). Therefore, Sartre's existentialism is an ideology that denies the existence of God. Sartre argued that God has no right to human freedom. "Man becomes what he wants" (Sartre, 1946) because only man who will responsible for his act. This is where the role of existentialism ideology for humans places it as a subject. Existentialism discusses the way a person finds his existence through emotion, responsibility, behavior and freedom. In the concept of existentialism according to Sartre, someone who punches another must be because of emotion, someone's beating is impossible without cause and purpose.

4. Values of Sartre's Existentialism

The concept of Sartre's existentialism has some points that have been collected by the researcher from several references explaining Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism.

a. Existence Precedes Essence

Every object in the world should have the essence, whether it is an object created by humans or an object that has existed on earth since humans did not exist. There are differences in opinion among existentialists. An existentialist who believes in the existence of God believes otherwise. Sartre believes that there is no inherent essence in humans instead, what comes first is existence. "A person who first exist: he materializes in the world, encounters himself, and only afterward defines himself" (Sartre, 1946: 490).

b. Radical Freedom

Sartre in *Basic Writing* by Priest (2002) states that there are two ways in which humans live their lives, authentically or *mauvaisefoi* – live with bad beliefs. An authentic life is a human life with all its freedoms, life without any bound. Sartrean freedom can be understood by understanding the situation because human is not separable from the situation. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains that freedom cannot be separated from human reality. "There is no difference between the being of man and being free" (Sartre, 1949: 25). Sartre believes that human possible to do anything, this possibility is called freedom. As a human, people possible to being whatever they want through the daily act.

c. Bad Faith

Leaving from anguish is the biggest threat to human existence. Sartre defines it as close nothingness because this attitude could make the individual unable to develop as a character. Inner contradictions caused by bad faith

can destroy human existences that have been formed and made by humans themselves. Generally, humans tend to generalize individual opinions about the world with habits and norms. Even though this generalization is what prevents humans from achieving what they might do as intact character.

d. Alienation

Alienation occurs when the individual is simply alienated from what is considered to be his authentic self. The consequences of alienation are social alienation, mental illness, crime, and general subjective disappointment with the world. Sartre also explains the concept of alienation in *Being and Nothingness* that is ignorance of inter-human relations. It is refusal in the sense that to be judged ignorant by others acts as a cause does on the freedom. (Sartre, 1949: 294). Alienation comes since the character replaces constant norms and people's natures with a different one, in favor of an authentic behavior and an affirmation of the way we are.

e. Death

Death or what Sartre calls nothingness is the biggest enemy of human existence. Sartre mentions death is an absurd thing, as absurd as birth. It suddenly came, "robs us of the ability to give meaning to our own past behavior by our present action" (Sartre, 1946:561).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The design of this research uses qualitative methods. Primary data sources were obtained from *The Stranger* by Albert Camus. The key instrument of this study is the writer himself. In doing the analysis the writer analyzes the characters' utterances and the author's narration to establish the meaning and interpretation. Data were collected using condensation techniques, data presentation, and verification of conclusions.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

1. The Existentialism in Meursault

Existentialism deals with values, attitudes, and relationships, which determine the man's role in society and the freedoms or ties he experiences. After the second World War, existentialism became popular in the world. After this important phenomenon, many things happened such as chaos, destruction, annihilation, fear, frustration on the one hand, and the collapse of traditional values on the other. The loss of the old worldview, faith, God, and belief in the human self together with suffering, anxiety, alienation, and loneliness makes life utterly senseless, meaningless, directionless, and pointless. Camus calls it a Sisyphean act.

The protagonist of *The Stranger* is Meursault, an absurdist who rejects the social construction and meaning of life. Problems started when Meursault left his mother at the nursing home. Meursault experienced alienation as a direct consequence of his individualistic, absurdist nature and rejecting the traditional views that developed in society. The author describes him as someone who does not care about the death of his mother and the values or traditions that run in his society. His nature and actions alienated Meursault from those around him, especially his mother's close relatives. In *The Stranger*, the characterization carried out by Albert Camus is direct characterization. Camus builds the character of the story in detail. Camus' absurdity can be seen from the characterization depicted in the character Meursault.

a. Absurdist

Meursault's first characteristic is absurdist. Absurdist or 'the absurd' means a conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning of life. It refers to the human inability to find any in a purposeless, meaningless, or chaotic and irrational universe. The characteristic is represented in the first part of *The Stranger*. At the beginning of the story, Meursault's Mother passed away. Meursault feels the people around his mother alienate him from their society, because Meursault did not take care of his mother for the rest of her life.

Then, Meursault interpreted his mother's death as normal, because the death will happen to anyone. Therefore, Meursault felt the natural sadness as a child. Even Meursault violated some actions that were considered unethical to be carried out when there was a death from a religious perspective, such as smoking. Such actions are considered disgraceful and do not indicate sadness.

Even more extreme, absurdities say that death is freedom. Meursault interpreted the death penalty which befell him as a freedom. A person who dies on death row is better off than someone who takes the act of suicide. This intersects with the meaningless life that Meursault feels. Death is the main path to radical freedom. At this stage, humans reflect on the limitations they have. There is a phase where humans reflect themselves to desire immortality. This is what Meursault experienced before his execution

b. Radical Freedom

Based on Sartre's argument that there is no fixed morality or human nature to determine human action, he believes that humans have radical freedom. This means that people have the absolute power to choose how they will act in any given situation and in their lives as a whole. Radical freedom can take from *The Stranger*. In

the first part, Meursault showed how his radical freedom attached to him from his mother's funeral moment till he was caught by the police because of the murder tragedy in the bungalow. Meursault is not really caring about the norms adopted in his society. Meursault has his views and standpoint.

In the second part, Meursault realized his careless actions could lead him to prison. And, in the prison, Meursault did not feel complete. However, at the end of the story, Meursault realizes that radical freedom is the freedom he gets after he is in prison. The freedom he fought for before was just his ego. His decision to accept the death penalty was a form of radical freedom. Thus, for Meursault, death is true freedom, whereas life is only transitory and artificial. Life does not give freedom fairly. Meanwhile, with death, humans are only confronted with God's law. From there, man will be immortal with the freedom he has. Thus, death has freed Meursault from the social alienation and self-alienation that shackled him.

2. Alienation In *The Stranger*

Alienation is the state of being alienated or estranged from something or somebody; it is a condition of the mind. Finkelstein (1965) defines alienation as "a psychological phenomenon, an internal conflict, a hostility felt towards something seemingly outside oneself which is linked to oneself, a barrier erected which is no defense but impoverishment of oneself. In *The Stranger* Novel, alienation can be seen in Meursault's life.

a. Self Alienation

In *The Stranger* novel, Camus describes the problem of the essence of life. This problem Camus always brings up in Meursault's thoughts; the description of humans in interpreting life. This intersects with Camus' idea of absurdity and human existence. For Meursault, life is nothing more than a series of activities that must be lived. This is the view of the figure of the absurdity. Life is true death.

Meursault lives his personal life in a monotonous and mechanistic manner. This can be seen from his habits. Meursault never thinks about dreams, desires, or goals in the future. The death of his mother, the presence of his girlfriend, and his friends could not totally touch his feelings. He refused promotion. However, Meursault felt something different on the first day she was imprisoned. However, this feeling did not last long. Meursault then returned to his idealism of not caring about what happened to him.

b. Social Alienation

Meursault lives in a very ethical social life. His society is adherent to traditionalist religious beliefs. It relates to the values, norms, and ethics of life which are quite strong. In this life society, someone's actions and behavior are linked to the way that has been established and governed by the agreed values, norms, and ethics. However, Meursault has committed actions that are contrary to the norms or values adopted by society in general. Another immodesty, which made him look like a stranger to others, was the way he treated others.

This characteristic of Meursault is one of the reasons which strengthens the alienation of Meursault. His way to become an existentialist cannot be accepted by his society or society's views totally in general. Selfishness is one of Meursault's expressions of his society as an absurdist. It relates to Sartre's concept about alienation: "each expression of the estranged state contradicts man's essential being, his potency for goodness" (Sartre, 1963). From his egoism, it means that Meursault has been shackled by his self-alienation. Meursault couldn't control what's inside of him. The alienation will trigger his social alienation. Meursault was trapped by his own egoism, Even though he had good intentions not to interfere with other people's business.

V. CONCLUSION

The alienation and existentialism in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* are embodied in the character Meursault. *The Stranger* is Albert Camus's thought about absurdism and existentialism which is presented in the form of literary works. Meursault, an indifferent French-Algerian is a serious attempt to sketch the confusion, frustration, alienation, disintegration, and estrangement of modern man.

In *The Stranger*, the characterization carried out by Albert Camus is direct characterization. Camus builds the character of the story in detail. Regardless of the sentences that indicate the Meursault officer. Meursault's character is also depicted through habits, jobs, and other characters' responses to his presence. Furthermore, Meursault chose alienation as his way of life with no ambition. Camus' absurdity can be seen from the characterization depicted in the character Meursault. The character development carried out by Camus serves to strengthen the theme of alienation and the absurd fiction that he has created.

The alienation is portrayed in Meursault's character, according to Sartre's concept, is divided into two forms: social alienation and self-alienation. By 'social alienation' it means: "the sense of estrangement brought out by the sudden discovery that the social system is either oppressive or incomplete with their desires and ideas. 'Self alienation', however, means the loss of contact of the individual selves with any inclinations or desires that are not in agreement with the prevailing social patterns, as a result of which the individuals are forced to manipulate in accordance with the social demands or feel incapable of controlling their actions".

The following character is some characters who foster alienation to the Meursault. These characters are absurdist, indifferent, careless, selfishness, and radical freedom. Meursault, as an absurdist, lacked the zeal for life. Then, Meursault's alienation is reinforced by Meursault's attitude of being indifferent, careless, and also selfish.

These three characters were considered negative value because it had an impact on Meursault's future, which is shown in the second part. The self-alienation is shown by Meursault is a tendency to reject the traditionalist views and values of Mediterranean society. Meursault didn't like spiritualities that are related to the supernatural and absurdity. The second is the radical freedom that Meursault embraces which makes him confused determine the actual limits of freedom. In conclusion, the form of alienation that has been described above is a form of Camus' existentialism depicted in the character Meursault.

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