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The Imaginary Room as a Coping Mechanism in the Gendered Urban Jakarta: Observing the Writings of Indonesian Female Authors

According to the feminist Hélène Cixous, the position of women in the city is as marginal as the position of Sphinx outside the metropolis Alexandria. She argued, “That is to say, she [Sphinx] is outside the city, at the edge of the city - the city is man, ruled by masculine law” (Cixous in Seizemore, 1992). Although this argument is established through a patriarchal framework, the idea of city as masculine is much valuable when looking at the case of female writers’ expression towards the metropolitan Jakarta. The rise of female writers in Indonesia in the end of 1990’s and the beginning of 2000’s was hand in hand with the period when Jakarta personified the country’s reformation, both politically as well as economically. The country was urgently looking for its new form, and new meanings about the city life are then produced. Literary works such as Nukila Amal’s *Cala Ibi* and Djenar Maesa Ayu’s “Waktu Nayla” (2002) offer the female’s perspective on the turmoil. This paper discusses how texts create imaginary rooms as excess of the dystopia urban Jakarta. Applying a psychoanalysis approach on the imagined – a concept coined by Jacques Lacan --, the paper finds that ‘the imaginary’ functions as a contestation against the “male” city.