

PSYCHOLOGICAL DYNAMICS OF “PEMULUNG” (TRASH PICKER)

*Marginalized Informal Community in Urban Life
in Yogyakarta*

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Introduction

Scavenger or trash picker in Bahasa called as Pemulung. Pemulung refer to people that have a profession as a collector of trash or used things (Azhari, 2009). Commonly pemulung are able to find on urban or city area because more garbage produce here than sub-urban or village area. Some of them live in street (homeless) and called as gelandangan. Gelandangan coming from “gelandang” which mean “rove, wander”. Their life style is actually equal with Gypsy community life style, who also doing an odyssey (Ghofur, 2009). But parts of them choose to live in a fix area and work around there. Basically, the members of the second group already tired to keep moving and play “hide and seek” with government officers.

Urban societies looking a street life as “a life which is an opposite with terminology of social acceptance”. In that terminology, “normal people” refer to whom who have permanent house, formal activity and job, family, and registered on government administration (Twikromo, 1999).



Whereas, pemulung or gelandang presence is a logic consequence which appear from various economic problems and unsecure feeling of village or sub-urban society, then forcing them to find the place that predicted able to give a better life (Suparlan in Ghofur, 2009). That is why most of pemulung or gelandangan are sub-urban or village society who gambling their fate with come to urban or city area.

The pemulung work from dawn until late night. But they hard work is not equal with what they get in trash management industries. On other side, society who underestimate the pemulung existence were stigmatized them as a thief or a scum of the earth. The stigmatization converted into marginalization as write on a board that place in front of entrance path. Ironically, in some education institution like university, also put that signboard to prohibit pemulung enters their environment. The reason is pemulung usually mess up the rubbish bin and make it look dirty.

The marginalization practice also happened in Yogyakarta with slogan “Berhati Nyaman” (Feel Comfort). “Berhati Nyaman” is acronym for BERSih (clean), seHAT (health), Indah (beauty), and Nyaman (comfort). This slogan being an anti-climax on pemulung existence and in implication making them as hunted community to put in order. Although with stigma and discrimination gived to their self, pemulung still survived and created their own social-culture. This study objective understood the psychological dynamics of pemulung who lived in that community.

This study was used qualitative method to describe pemulung’s psychological dynamics as marginalized informal community. The samples of this study are pemulung who work at Yogyakarta’s final garbage Gump. This place located on Piyungan, Bantul, and called TPA Piyungan. In 2004 it was estimated 46% of Yogyakarta Province’s garbage are dumped to TPA Piyungan. About more than 500 pemulung are working and living here with cows and goats (Yuliati & Suhartini; Bernas Jogja).

To collected data, researcher used semi-structured interviews and non-participation observation. Interview were conducted with randomized and until reach the saturation of data. Then, it was analyzed by open coding technique. First step is making transcript of interview and three person were coded the data into small category. After that, the raters make big theme from te small categories.

The saturation of data was reached when interviewed conducted with the seventh respondent. Respondents were consisted from four males and three males. The youngest was 25 years old and the oldest was 56 years old, while the age mean of the respondents' was 33 years old. Most of them were low educated with the last education were junior high school. But there was one respondent who hold bachelor degree in education.

Their origin places were various but most of them coming from village around Bantul or from Central Java Province. In average, they already work and live at TPA Piyungan for two until three years. But some of them already more than five years become a pemulung, not only at Piyungan but at many places. Four respondents already married, one divorced, and two still single. From those four couples, two of them were met their spouse at TPA Piyungan and married there. While the rest were coming from their village with their spouse and entrust their children to their family on the village. The summary is shown on the table below:

Initial	Sex	Age	Education	Marital status	Experience (in years)	Origin place
A	M	25	ES	No	3	Bantul
J	M	40	JHS	Yes	13	Sragen
Sp	M	56	Ug	Yes	20	Wonosari
Sn	F	30	JHS	Yes	3	Bantul
Sm	F	34	JHS	No	3	Bantul
T	F	21	JHS	Yes	2	Muntilan
L	M	27	ES	No	2	Jejara

ES = Elementary School, JHS = Junior High School, Ug = Undergraduate
 From small categories, the rater pulled four big themes :

Pemulung Ignored Stigma or Label from Society Because they Believe that What They do is *Halal* Permitted by Islam;

Indonesia is religious country that the majority is Islam religion. It was reflected from respondents' answer who stressed that their job is a *halal* activity because it did not harm other people. But they know there are some pemulung who stole people things in front of their house. It was done when pemulung did not get enough things to collect but the time already late. Although like that, the respondents explain that this problem is return to individually and his/her business

with Allah as said J:

“Yang penting kan saya gak mencuri, hanya mengambil barang yang ada di tempat sampah. Berarti kan sudah tidak dipakai dan dibuang. Saya cuma ngumpulin dan memilih-milihnya, terus saya jual. Apa saya salah? Halal toh itu? Kalau teman-teman [pemulung] yang lain ada yang mencuri karena gak nemu banyak ya urusan mereka. Yang berhak menghukum kan Allah. Saya hanya berusaha tidak melakukan hal itu.”

(The most important is I did not steal, just take things in rubbish bin. It means did not used and dumped. I just collected and sorted, then sell. Am I wrong? It is halal, isn't it? If my friends stole because did not find lot of things, it was their business. Someone who deserved punish is Allah. I am just trying to not doing that).

In general respondents ignored the stigma given to them. Beside because feel their job is *halal*, pemulung also think that the people who stigmatized them were not feeding them, as Sm said :

“Terserah masyarakat mau bilang kami ini apa. Terserah mereka mau nganggap kami ini dekil, kotor, atau sampah masyarakat. Saya gak peduli. Mereka gak ngasih saya makan kok. Kalo saya gak kerja hari ini berarti saya gak bakal makan hari ini, gak bisa nyimpen buat sarapan besok.”

(Whatever societies want to say about us. Up to them to consider that we were dirty or as the scum of the earth. I do not care. They do not feeding us. If I did not work today, it mean I will not eat and not able to save for breakfast tomorrow morning).

Their Motive is to Get Income for Their Children' Education Cost in Order to Get a Better Life;

It is interesting enough that pemulung who married and have children think about their children education. But this thought only been met on pemulung who entrust their children in origin place, as J said :

“Sebagian saya kirim ke kampung untuk biaya sekolah anak. Supaya mereka bisa sekolah yang tinggi, sampai kuliah kalau bisa. Kalau cuma lulusan SMP kayak saya kan susah cari kerja. Biar ibu-bapaknya saja

yang kerja seperti ini, yang penting anak-anak sekolah [yang] bener, jadi orang (sukses).”

(Part of it I sent to my origin place for my children education cost. So that they able to educated well, until university if possible. If just graduate from junior high school like me, it was difficult to find a job. Let just their parents who work like this, but the most important that kids are schooling and become success).

This situation is able to understand because thinking pattern of Indonesia societies still considers that success people are officer with high salary. To work at office and get high salary it must high educated. In their opinion, if pemulung's income more than officer's salary, it is still not be able to said as success. Pemulung's criteria for success did not consider time work flexibility like they have. On the other side, the couples who meet and married at TPA Piyungan tend to worried about their children education. It is happened because from their life experience, high education is not guaranteeing someone to get good job with high salary. In their opinion, the important things are skill, experience, and social network, as said from F:

“Sekolah sekarang itu mahal, uang darimana? Cukup bisa baca, tulis, sama hitung. Gak perlu sekolah sampai universitas segala. Saya jadi pemulung ini sebenarnya lulusan SD aja cukup. Belum tentu sekolah tinggi-tinggi bisa langsung dapat kerja yang gajinya besar. Lebih baik pengalaman diperbanyak, tidak perlu teori macam-macam. Pergaulan juga perlu diperhatikan. Kadang rejeki tuh datang lewat temen atau saudara. Kayak saya ini contohnya. Dulu pertama kali saya ke sini karena dapat informasi dari temen. Kalau enggak, saya masih keliling di jalanan kali. Berbuat baik sama orang lain itu penting. Kita kan gak tahu besok kalau susah siapa yang nolong. Tapi kalau banyak berbuat baik sama orang lain, Allah bisa aja nolong lewat orang lain.”

Now, school is expensive, where is the money come from? It is enough to reading, writing, and calculating. It does not need to educate until university. To become pemulung like me, it is actually enough just graduated from elementary school. It is not guaranteed that high education makes you get job with big salary. It is better to rich experience, does not need too much theories. Social network is needed to be cared. Sometime money comes from friends or family. Just like

me in example. The first time I came here because gotten information from my friend. If not, maybe I am still on the road. Doing the goodness to the others is important. We do not know tomorrow when we in difficult time, who will help us. But if we many doing goodness, Allah maybe help us trough them (1).

Pemulung Did not Care About Their Safety When Work Because so far They Never Injured

“Berat jalannya kalau pake sepatu boot. Mending sandal jepit aja yang ringan. Kalau pakai sarung tangan juga repot, gak leluasa, panas juga. Apalagi pas make masker. Saya cuma pernah sekali pake masker waktu dulu ada yang ngasih. Pengap rasanya, gak bebas.”
[A]

(Difficult to walk if clump along. It is better to use a heavy sandal. If use glove also makes me difficult to work, and hot too. Worse if use mask. I just used it once when someone gave it to me. It was felt stuffy).

That is reflection of pemulung’s unawareness about their healthy. They not realized that risked to inhaling dangerous particles from things on TPA Piyungan or their collection. Many kinds of sharp things also potential to hurt or make infection to them. But pemulung did not care about that because it just some of they friend got injured, not their self. Besides that, the respondents tend to ignore a sickness that they suffer.

“Paling flu atau batuk. Tapi kalau cuma begitu sih tetep kerja. Kalau rasanya badan demam atau meriang juga saya tetep mulung. Soalnya kalau saya sehari gak kerja, ya saya gak dapet uang untuk makan hari itu. Malah bisa tambah sakit kan saya. Kalau orang kantoran mah bisa cuti sakit. Saya kalau ikutan cuti ya keluarga bisa gak makan sehari.”
(Sn)

(Commonly flu or cough. But if only that is still working. If the body feel dizzy or fever, I still work too. Because if I am not work for a day, the consequence is I will not get the money for eat in that day. I can be sicker if like that. People who work in the office are able to take furlough. If I do a same like them, my family can fast for a day).

If sick, pemulung usually keep and let the symptom that they feel. If it getting worse or in few days did not disappear than they will buy medicine at mini store. The information about the medicine usually based on their experiences or asking with friends. When the condition very serious and pemulung just lay on the bad, it is alarm for them to go to Center of Public Health (Puskesmas). In basically they unwilling to make relation with a doctor because must pay the service and buy the medicine that written on recipe. For pemulung, become sick is something that very expensive.

They Hope That Government and Society More Appreciated Them and Admit “*Pemulung*” as a Legal Profession.

“Kalau bisa pemerintah itu tidak mengejar-ngejar kami. Dulu waktu saya masih mulung di jalanan, tiap minggu itu pasti ada garukan sama satpol. Kalau ketangkep kami dimasukkan ke panti sosial. Di sana cuma dikasih makan, malah seperti tahanan. Padahal kami mulung untuk cari makan (diri) sendiri.” [A]

(If possible, the government does not pursue us. When I was still *mulung* on the street, every week must be a raid by *satpol*. If chased, we sent into social institution. In social institution we just feeded, instead being regarded as prisoner. Whereas we *mulung* for our self).

All of respondents do not have KTP (ID Card). Beside full of troublesome, make a KTP also need cost and time. In other side, their job is not confessed by the government. This situation then impact to citizen census. Hundreds of pemulung on TPA Piyungan consider as if nothing, they are like citizens without homeland. While in another side, the pemulung also hope that society more able to accept their existence. Actually pemulung are not care about this but sometimes it make uncomfortable situation as said by L:

“Sebelum di sini [Piyungan] saya mulung keliling. Kadang kalau masuk perumahan atau kampung, ada aja orang yang ngeliatin terus. Mungkin mereka mikir saya ini mau nyuri. Apalagi kalo di sana ternyata baru saja ada yang kehilangan barang.”

(Before here, I *mulung* walk around. Sometime if entered a house complex or village, there were people staring at me. Maybe they thought that I want to steal. Especially if there someone who lost his/her things before).

Based on big themes that already were described above, it was able to say that the personality characteristic of pemulung is hard worker. They did not easy to become hopeless and able to solve their daily live problems. Because of that, if any opinion tell that pemulung is useless people, it was not true. And also if any statement that sounds Indonesia is lazy people, that idea was debatable. The pemulung also have good adaptation skill. They able to communicate with their partner and adjust with new environment when move to TPA Piyungan. Neighborliness and hospitality which becomes icons of Indonesia still emitted from pemulung's life style.

Rationalization as psychological defense mechanism makes the respondents able to doing their job as pemulung. Their beliefs that this job are categorized as halal and not harm others were the example of pemulung's rationalization. Besides that, pemulung also make repression toward the stigma and labeling that they get. Although pemulung try to repress the stigma, they still hope that government and society more able to appreciate their existence. It reflects a presence of ambiguity in pemulung self. As a result, pemulung who considered as the scum of the earth and useless people created their own community and live with their social-culture. This condition is identified as reaction formation defense mechanism.

From others point of view, formation of pemulung community that marginalized was a symbol of needs. The pemulung who were united have need of affiliation or social interaction. Uniquely in that community, the pemulung's need of autonomy is also able to accommodate. This condition happened because pemulung flexibel work schedule and not bound with official administration like tax. The pemulung who live on TPA Piyungan also able to fulfill their basic needs like food, house, and sex. But life reality and experience make them have various paradigma in viewing education. Some of them consider it as a need but others not too care about it. For expectation, they hope that pemulung considered as a legal profession. It was linked closely with human needs of existential and well being.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that pemulung as marginalized community also have psychological dynamic like's dominant community. They have good personality characteristic, appropriate psychological defense mechanisms, and also several needs as well as other human in this world. It is important to noted that pemulung is also Indonesia citizen. But in fact the government still considers as a second class citizen that only polute this country. This condition could be observed when state officer comes to some place then pemulung and gelandang will be hunted and sent to social institution. They were rested and treated as if criminal that only right to government. It is our homework to change a paradigm toward pemulung. We can start from our self with not to stigmatized them and give a respect to their profession.

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