

SPIRITUAL PRECARITY AND MENTAL ILLNESS REHABILITATION: THE WAY TO SPIRITUALITY DISCOURSE IN PUBLIC LIFE.

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ABSTRACT

In Javanese culture, Madness, spirituality and religion are all deeply rooted metaphysical phenomena. In Javanese community, there are many experiences of the unthinkable and untouchable which have big spiritual effects on persons with mental illness. This research looks at how some recovered patients with mental illness become religious and spiritualist. Seeing social precarity, social withdrawal and psychosis phenomena, this study will show how spirituality of religion used as media to rehabilitate and re-socialize the patient with mental healing need. Since this research was standing in religion and public life framework, this research will be focused on how the process of mental rehabilitation was also shaping spirituality discourse in public life. Through interviewing recovered patients treated in mental hospitals and with traditional healing, this study also seeks the connection between mental vulnerability, religiosity and madness.

Keyword: Religion, spiritual precarity, Mental Illness, Spiritual Discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Mental illness is both social-physical and religious phenomena. Meaning, communities were not only seeing mental illness as purely physical problem, but also metaphysical matter. Javanese community has various responses related to mental illness. According to Geertz, in Javanese community there are various terms used as the factors of mental illness because of disturbed by spiritual being, such as *kesurupan* (possessed), *kesetanan* (diablerie), *sawanan* (getting ill because of seeing ghost), *kesambet* (disturbed by spiritual being) and many more. Thus, someone who possessed by *lelembut* (spiritual being), will be out of control over their selves (1981;26). Seeing this conception, it is interesting to see how communities are recognizing that mental illness is metaphysical and spiritual phenomena. Traditionally, in Javanese community there are many rituals used to heal mental illness, such as *selamatan* (ritual for salvation), *ruwatan*¹ (religious ritual to case away bad luck) and so on. Traditionally, the healer of mental illness usually called as *dukun* (shaman), in Islamic tradition called as Kiai (Islamic Preacher-clergymen). Seeing this relation, the writer sees that the relation between religion and mental illness was heavily rooted in Javanese traditional culture.

Traditional perspective about *kesurupan* (possessed by spiritual being) was no longer relevant with the mental hospital using western science. In the western science, mental disorder was caused by various factors such as genetic, depression, drugs and so on². Thus, in Western science, mental illness was purely physical-psychological disorder, meaning the conception about spiritual being was rejected. Kiki, a nurse, said that in the mental hospital, religious spirituality was also used, but not as medicine, it is as *ketrampilan dasar* (basic skill). Here the writer sees that there are polarities perspectives about mental illness, traditionally and scientifically.

Inspired by what Kertzer said about politics and religion, I saw medical treatment was also do the same. As he said that “ritual was identified with religion, since modern western societies was presumably separated political affair from religious life, there is an assumption that ritual remains politically significant only in less ‘advance’ society” (Kertzer, 1988:3). Likewise political affair, mental healing using religious ritual as also seen as ‘primitive’, ‘less advanced’ in practices, and could not be accepted scientifically. Because of dilemmatic practices, this field research was conducted in the Grhasia mental hospital Yogyakarta, in *kelompok pengajian* (religious group of worship) where former patient of Grhasia were active, and in the Pondok pesantren (Islamic seminaries) Al-Qodir, in Cangkringan,. However, since this research was focused on religious studies, it will be focused in the former patients and how they understand and expressed their spirituality in public life.

Regardless from problematic acceptance of religion in mental healing, since there are two majors mainstream in understanding mental illness, this paper also will focus on how religion involved both scientifically and traditionally in the process of mental healing, and how these processes contribute also in religiousity movement. Simply writing, I would argue that the big phenomena such as religious revivalism, Islamic movement began with the small aspect process; it is the process in mental rehabilitation.

Through interviewing recovered patient of schizophrenia, this research conducted deep interview about social-spiritual security (also called by Allison as social precarity and I modify as spiritual precarity), spirituality experience, and strong commitment in religious teaching. I explore the phenomena of mental rehabilitation with the lens of “spirituality discourse”.

Spirituality Discourse

After *Maghrib* (sunset prayer), the sky was drizzling, the street has still muddy from afternoon rain. In the small village, Ngaglik, Sleman, I am waiting in the foyer home. Some young men-women are gathering in the hall reciting Quran together. Beside them is an *ustadz* (Islamic teacher) who has also known as *orang pintar* (supernatural men). After allowed to enter, I meet with Jasmine, Boy, Bagus and Rose (pseudonym) and some others. All of them are recovered patients of Mental Hospital, Grhasia Yogyakarta.

Rose was charming, she told me about her spiritual experience during mental illness rehabilitation, and the why she proudly wearing *hijab*. She told me that she is un-*hijab*-ed before. Her decision to wear *hijab* was coming after her illness and her involving with other recovered patients learning Quran for spirituality.

² An interview with Kiki, a nurse in Grhasia mental hospital, 15 Desember 2015 Yogyakarta

“Previously, I never think that I could be like this, as many girls in Yogyakarta, I want to be modest and also have a lovely boyfriend -:), it made me feel so anxious and worried with my condition, I feel that I was so fat, black skin, ugly face and unlovable and I think that I was not accepted in my community and even in my family. For my health, I have no problem at all, until once upon a night, I got hard headache. I did not remember everything. My mother told me that I was screaming in the midnight, biting pillows and throwing everything, My neighbors said that I was *kesurupan* (possessed by evil spirit), then they call an *ustadz* to cure me, but my mother said that my condition was not even better, it happened several times. After bringing to mental hospital, the doctor said that I was getting schizophrenia, a word that just already knew the meaning. In the small room with many strangers, they inject me medicine that made me fall asleep. I felt that I was ignored from my own family, throwing in the horrible and isolated place called as RSJ (Mental Hospital), it made me so sad, because everyone will call me crazy. With bounded hand, I felt so cold, when I see the wall, there is such a ghost coming and they laughed at me, they have many eyes that staring at me always. Sometime I think that nothing wrong with me, I have no such that symptom before. Because of financial problem, my parent brought me home and they call an *ustadz* to heal me and to guide me reading and reading Quran. My parent believe that I was disturbed by an evil spirit called as *Banaspaty* (a scary ghost with fire tongue) , because I carelessly throwing my sanitary napkins of my menstruation everywhere. In home, when I felt that I could not control myself, I read and re-read Quran. In the midnight when I’ am reciting Quran, I felt that my heart was so cold, touched, calm and I was crying, as if God was very close to me and He said “I will be with you” and I felt I was born for twice. After that time, I was enjoying my activities, my symptom slowly disappears and I have strong commitment with Islamic teaching, reciting Quran together, and made me no upset or feeling anxious.”

“So what made you wear *hijab*?”

“I would do Islamic teaching entirely; I feel there is bunch of spiritual power when I wear *hijab*, it is not about moral or everything, but spiritual reason”.

Understanding Rose’s stories and the reason behind her commitment in wearing *hijab* and attending religious group (*kelompok pengajian*) as spirituality process is fascinating. Generally, in Indonesia, the phenomenon of *hijab* was closely associated with the resurgence of Islamic political parties and the contribution of media, while understanding spirituality is much more complex than just seeing it as big agenda of Islamic movement. If Suzanne Brenner stated that veil phenomenon in Indonesia is part of moral discourse in which it becomes contested between democratization and Islamic morality (2011, 478), I saw it is more complex phenomena. If Brenner politically see the phenomenon of veil as “morality discourse”, I examine in the case of mental illness rehabilitation as “spirituality discourse” as the contestation between medical and spirituality religious teaching. Meaning, it was growing up as part of spirituality need. It is not designed or dictated by any certain group-government. It grows up naturally and publicly as part of religious teaching.

I began my points about spirituality discourse in seeing how each member of this *kelompok pengajian* are having strong commitment to invite their friend to learn about Quran together, sharing their religious experience. What made me surprise is most of them are having negative view about Western science perspective over mental illness which does not consider spirituality aspect. Some of them are really swear that they feel kind of religious experience. Borrowing Ammerman' term that religious experience is "feeling, or any experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand to whatever they may consider the divine" (2007:204). This experience, as they recognized gives a new hope for them in seeing good life. They live in spiritualist ways and in close relation with God.

Another religious experience was told by Bagus, he told me that he had always in conflict with his parent before, playing with their friends until midnight, drinking alcohol and more.

"In the night when I could not sleep, I saw a big gigantic creature staring at me, coming closer and try to strangle my neck; I tried to scream out of loud, but I have lost my voices. It happened several times until I thought that I would die soon. I consulted with my private psychologist, and he said also that I got schizophrenia, a kind of mental disorder and he also gives me recipe for my medicine. Meanwhile I also consult to *orang pintar* and he said that there is someone tries to give me bad luck through sending *makluk halus-hantu cekik* (spiritual being) to kill me. I suppose that who send me black magic is the man close to my girlfriend, he is jealous with me. The supernatural man gives me *a jimat* (an amulet) that should I bring and *amalan-wiridan*(spiritual words that I should chant it) to protect myself. When the scary ghost was coming, I read the *wiridan* and read and read again as much as I can spell. Sometime the ghost was suddenly disappeared and sometime I can't hold any further and i lost my consciousness, but after I wake up, I know that I have not died yet. Feeling secure and calm during *wiridan*, I was curious with religious teaching. It saves me several times from bad spiritual being and finally, I trust supernatural men before my private psychologist". (Bagus, 23)

Generally, I saw the members of *kelompok pengajian* who are the former of mental illness patients are having similar pattern. They are having social problem, sometime family withdrawal, getting mental illness and having spiritual journey in the rehabilitation process. If Allison introduced social precarity in Japan (2012 ; 348), I will extend it into spiritual precarity. I modify the description as a condition of being and feeling far away from both spiritual and religious life, extended with feeling insecure and hopeless from spiritual being forces that extend to pathological symptom.

Spiritual precarity is also different from precarity of 'soul' mentioned by Allison which is described as material condition of life making, including work and existential condition (2012;349). I give the meaning of Spiritual precarity as it is deeper and involved spiritual feeling, and spirituality of soul. Spirit is 'something other' than physic and soul. Following Ibnu Jauziyyah who classifies human as *badan* (physical form), *ruh* (soul) and spirit (*nafs*) (2000;175), I understand soul as mind consciousness, while the spirit is the eternal entity which drive the soul. In the spirituality discourse, spiritual

precarity was seen as lacking meaning - understanding about the essential meaning of spiritual.

The point about spirituality discourse was not solely coming from spiritual-religious process itself, but also from Javanese understanding about cultural psychology which is also influenced by cosmological belief and spiritual forces. Here Subandi said that the root of understanding about outside forces and inner forces has been deeply rooted, and understanding about spiritual forces has been largely shared across classes in Yogya-Javanese community (2007; 255).

Particularly in this context, I saw spiritual precarity as a respond over modern lifestyle, with modernization, high competition, and others situation which caused turmoil and anxieties. If a person was not ready yet, they are facing modernity with weak spirituality; they will be vulnerable to face the problem. Whether economic, social, existential and so on, if they were lacking from spirituality, they will be vulnerable for psychiatric symptom.

Based on my interview, spirituality in Javanese community can also manifest in the role of family in caring out religiosity. Family is the main pillar in maintaining spiritual harmony and social life. It also becomes protector from spiritual precarity.

Borrowing and modifying Allison's term, spiritual precarity was coming from ordinary refuges, in which they were coming from individual modern life and tends to live in secular ways.

When I raised a question about how important religion at the time before getting mental illness? They said that religion is important but not as important as now.

“At those time, I thought that religion was only adequate for my parent. It is so yesterday and I would not follow my parent. When they asked me to *ngaji* (reciting Quran) I was lazily did it, and my parent always be angry with me” (Jasmine, 24 years).

“I understand religion as pray, ritual and many more, just like other Javanese ritual and I do not understand about the essence meaning of religion, my father only ask me to pray in *langgar* (small masque), but he never explains to me the reason why we have to pray, and merely I reject and deny him. Now, I understand religion better, it is as ways for getting better life, and the way to give all my life to God ” (Boy, 27 years).

In this point, I see that the effect of mental illness rehabilitation becomes turning point for them in learning about spirituality. I understand spirituality in this *kelompok pengajian* as the ways for being religious through religion traditionally. It is different with contemporary American spirituality which is seeking for the essence meaning of religion through religious experiences and the meaning of religion itself (Ammerman, 2007). Yet, whatever it is, I see that spirituality movement in everyday life was shaped through various setting and number of multiple traditions. Generally writing, my point about spirituality discourse in the context mental illness rehabilitation is how spirituality becomes part of daily life and as motivation for their activities.

Obsession of Pure Islam

One of interesting case about Yani's mental illness, in Subandi's analysis is her obsession of pure Islam. This case narrated by Subandi as when

Yani recites *doa*, she can organize her behavior, the *dua* is also as potential source for healing. Since there are dichotomies in Islam about pure Islam and Islam *abangan*³, Yani had had willingness to accept only true Islam, not *abangan*. (2007; 254-255) . This phenomenon is interesting since the term about pure Islam and not pure also shaping the consciousness about white magic and black magic, and theme about black magic in mental illness is still strong in the Javanese Islamic discourse. While when I ask to former patients of schizophrenia, they also think the same. Boy said that

“I want to learn Quran and its meaning, so all my activities will be based on Quran, I don’t want to get other” (Boy, 27 years)

“I want to live in *Qur’an* and *Sunnah*, with the teaching of our prophet, I have done a big sin, and I do worried if God does not give his mercy” (Bagus, 23 years).

Beside these four former patients, there is also Faris. He was allowed to be out patients from Grhasia for two months ago, and he joined *kelompok pengajian* around 1 week. Sometimes, Faris was still heard about an awkward voice as if the thunder will grab him while he was in the darkness. In the worse moment he also bits his father, because his face looked like a monster. Different with others, Faris is rarely to speak. He always closes his mouth with his hand when I asked him. He said that his voice is not like usual, it is not my voice, said he. The common phrases uttered by Faris when I asked him are *astaghfirullah* (I beg forgiveness to Allah), than followed with *subhanallah* (Praise to Allah). The most repeated phrase is *astaghfirullah*.

Seeing these phrases, I saw that the person who began in the mental illness recovery from depression seem feel big guilty for everything that what they did. As if they bring a myriad and even a mountain of sin. Seeing these phenomena, I agree with Subandi’ s idea about an assumption of dirty body. As subandi said that “In cases of depression in Java, feelings that the body is impure often play powerfully along with feelings of being sinful and guilty and of having disappointed God and lost his favor—familiar patterns” (Subandi, 2007; 255). In Faris case, I saw how the feeling of guilty, blaming oneself, and feeling hopeless and ignored can manifest into a condition where a person always ask help forgiveness from God.

I want to explore this phenomenon as rejection from who they really are in the past. Ifa, a nurse in Grhasia, told me that patient with great depression and feeling guilty tends to hurt their selves and even pretend to suicide (Interview, 28 Des, 2015). It is seem like what happened in Japan as soul precarity. But in the recovery process in Japan, there is no something called as obsession of religion. In Faris phenomenon seem like religion become comfort place to escape from any problems.

Since religion becomes comfort place-shelter for refuge, they want to build and devote their selves totally in the shelter. When I asked to Faris about what he really needs, he said that “ I’am still doing a big sin, and I try to stop it”. When I asked what kind of sin it is, he replays “Smoking”. Here I try to understand about what makes some one feels guilty because of smoking? What happen with smoking in the eyes of religion until it was presumably seen as big sin. When the ustadz explains that smoking is *makruh* (not good) in Islam, I see

³ A typology given by Geertz to describe community which is hold kejawen tradition, but recognize themselves as muslim

how Faris and his friend were obsessed to do Islamic teaching purely, avoiding something that is not good in the perspective of religion.

Another obsession is religious ritual, such as fasting in Monday and Thursday, reciting Quran and *wiridan* regularly and mid night praying. When I asked them what for these activities, Boy directly answered “To reject black magic”, Jasmine “To be protected by God”.

Understanding their answers, I would to relate between Javanese consciousness about cosmological belief, in which there are two kinds of spiritual power in the cosmic war, black power-magic (*ilmu hitam*) and white power (*ilmu putih*), and the black magic only can be destroyed by white power, and white power belongs to religion. Their obsession to pure Islam was motivated with local consciousness.

Here Javanese understanding about spirit and spirituality plays important roles. Besides shaping understanding about ‘other being’- ‘other forces’, it also gives consciousness about cosmological idea in the structure of human soul and spirit. The consciousness is physical body of human being is only form only a place where the soul and the spirit live in.

Sufistic Rehabilitation

I began my point about *sufistic* rehabilitation by observing the manner of rehabilitation and how they understand religion and spiritually. According to *ustadz* Amin, “there are various ways in rehabilitating mental illness depending on the factors of their madness. Mostly they were asked to *dzikir* and reciting Quran to keep their consciousness. It is also influencing their behavior; they have good control over their selves” (Interview, 27, Des). When I asked about spirituality and religion, Amin said that “Actually I do not teach religion, only spirituality, because I was not *Kiayi* of *pesantren* (Islamic Seminaries clergymen), I only guide them to achieve spirituality through reciting Quran and *dzikiran* (Remembering God). As long as I saw it gives positive impact, I think it is good for them”.

The method of *sufistic* rehabilitation can’t be separated from Javanese mysticism to get closer to God, it called as *suluk* (the ways to get closer to God). The main purpose of *suluk* is controlling one-self from any satanic temptation, and purifying soul from any dirtiness. In the form mental illness rehabilitation, I understand *suluk* as part of cosmic war in which a person invented to do *Jihad akbar* (big religious war), it is controlling *hawa nafsu* (Pseudo happiness temptation) and war against Satan (evil spirit).

In seeing *sufistic* rehabilitation as spirituality discourse, I ask them to tell about their experience feeling of “mysterious tremendum⁴” during *sufistic* rehabilitation. Boy told me

“ In the midnight when it was very cold, an *ustadz* asked me to enter to the big *gentong* (a big water place made from soil), then *gentong* was filled with water and flower. I have to stay in the *gentong* until *subuh* (morning prayer) and I have to keep my consciousness. When I was very tired, I close my eyes and almost sleep, and between conscious and unconscious, I see an old man, wearing white clothes and smiling at me. I was in the dark place, my hand and my feet were tied with strong rope by a big black gigantic creature, then an old man come and release my bondage. I believe

⁴ A term by Eliade to describe about supernatural feeling or feeling about “the sacred”.

that the old man is a *wali* (Saint) send by God to save me, after I wake up I felt that as if I have no problem at all, I was like birds set free from its prison, I was free, have no burden in my life” (Boy, 27 years).

I would like to see the story in the spirituality framework, a narration in which an old man releases him from bondage and gives him spiritual energy. In Javanese religion and mythologies, the old man is an archetypal of religious power and black gigantic monster is satanic power which brings negative energy. If possible to borrow religious language, it is the war between “angel” and “demon” in human mind and body. The angel wins and gives inner power. the power that psychologically called by Jung as “psychic energy” (Carter, 2000: 79).

In seeing the image of an old man and gigantic creature, I would relate sufistic rehabilitation and Javanese mysticism. There is unbroken line between them in seeing the cosmic and the structure of soul. The consciousness is about the recognition in seeing the spirit, the soul and the body as part of universe, and the universe not only belong to human, but also human fellow. Thus, when there is imbalance between physical world and spiritual world, the spirit of soul becomes vulnerable.

I would like to see the conception above as part of consciousness which is embedded culturally. This is also as the way how recovered mental illness patients understand about what happened with them.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing spiritual precarity and mental rehabilitation, I have found some points. First is spirituality and religious dimension in the in the mental process rehabilitation is part of spirituality discourse. Meaning, it have impact in everyday life, how someone gives the meaning of spirituality in their daily life activities. Secondly, it is about spiritual precarity which should be faced by young adult. There are many factors from spiritual precarity, such as family, social competition which made spirituality becomes vulnerable.

The conception about mental illness was much influenced with Javanese mysticism and the understanding about cosmological structure of universe and soul. Since there are unbroken line between *sufistic* rehabilitation and Javanese mysticism about ‘spiritual forces’ the recovered patients were obsessed in the true Islam as the way for salvation.

In the brief conclusion, I argue that sufistic rehabilitation has provided shelter for spiritual discourse in which it also contributes the dynamical perspective about religion in public life. The shelter in the spiritual discourse was the place where the lost consciousness about Javanese mysticism and Javanese cosmological understanding can be found.

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