

THE DISCOURSE OF SUICIDE: BETWEEN MYTH AND REALITY

I Wayan Suwena

Anthropology Study Program Faculty of Humanities, Udayana University
wsuvenas58@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

People thinking mythically are oriented towards myths in response to particular incidents like responding to suicide incident in Gunungkidul. The suicide incident in this region is legitimized by the *pulung gantung* myth. However, for realistically minded people they do not believe that people commit suicide due to downfall or getting possessed by *pulung gantung*. Thus, this paper aims to understand and analyze the discourse of mythically and realistically minded people in the context of suicide incidents. When a suicide occurs, the mystically minded people will attribute this incident to the myth of *pulung gantung*. They believe that prior to a suicide incident is often marked with the appearance of *pulung gantung*. The *pulung gantung* resembles to a fireball. When this appears, it is interpreted that it looks for a mind-empty person. The person who is experiencing the empty-mindedness will easily experience a downfall or get possessed by the fireball to commit suicide. In contrast to the discourse of the realistically minded people, the fireball is just a natural phenomenon. They discourse that people committing suicide in this region happens because they are experiencing unresolved problems in life. The suicide issues are usually not single. This situation causes the people concerned to experience depression. When they are depressed and nobody is involved in their communication, ultimately they are desperate and vulnerable to commit suicide.

Keywords: suicide, *pulung gantung* myth, mind-empty, and realistic.

INTRODUCTION

Suicide is a deviant act and violates the values of religious life. In the meantime, nobody justifies whatever is the reason for people to commit suicide or revoke their life in their own way. This suicide incident looks like an iceberg, where on the surface it looks relatively small but beneath the surface is large. Relevant to this statement, in particular region on this earth, there are recorded low numbers of suicide cases while in other regions are high.

One of the district regions whose suicide rates are relatively high in Indonesia is the region of Gunungkidul (World Mental Health Day, 2006; Rachmawati, 2008). During the period of 2003 to 2012, the suicide rate reached an average of 33 people every year. Majority the suicide mode in this region is by hanging himself (Suwena, 2016). This fact shows that suicide in this region is a humanitarian tragedy, while the cause of which is still a mystery so there are opinions arising among scientists, government officials, citizens, and researchers.

Broadly speaking, the opinions compiled come from some circles about the causes of people committing suicide that can be categorized into two types, namely (1) the downfall or getting possessed in *pulung gantung* and (2) experiencing depression caused by unresolved problems in life, and then the victims despair. Those arguing that suicide is caused by *pulung gantung* make suicide incidents in this region mysterious. Mystery of the suicide here happens due to the involvement of supernatural beings in the form of a tailed-glowing fireball whose appearance is mysterious. Thus, those who argue that

suicide is caused by the idea of *pulung gantung*, in this case, are categorized to be mythically minded people.

Conversely, for those who argue that suicide is caused by despair in living an unresolved troubled life are categorized to be realistically minded people. The realistically minded people responding to suicide incidents are oriented to logical thinking by using logic. With the presence of these two opinions in response to suicide incidents in the region, this study becomes interesting, unique, and needs to get the attention.

RESEARCH METHOD

This belongs to a qualitative research using a series of data collection techniques. The main data collection techniques include observation, in-depth interviews, and bibliographical study.

In the process of selecting informants, initially they were selected basic informants (Koentjaraningrat, 2012). Furthermore, from them were then selected a number of key informants that were interviewed in depth.

As implications of this qualitative research, the main research instrument is the researcher itself (Moleong, 2012; Pelto, 1979). In addition, this research was also supported by the use of interview guides and voice recorder.

DISCUSSION

The Myth of *Pulung Gantung* Frames Suicidal Action

Subjective experience of community members that admitted to have seen the appearance of the fireball, where some people name it as comet, *pulung*, *ndaru*, and *teluh brojo*, explains if the four entities are in the form of light. People view the appearance of the comet, *pulung*, *ndaru*, and *teluh brojo* as a phenomenon having supernatural powers so that it does not always emerge or every day and can be observed.

Broadly speaking, based on the form and color of the light emitted, people in this region distinguish the character of the *pulung* into two types, namely the jinx (*pageblug*) called *pendung pulung*, and the *pulung* bringing glory or luck. According to public knowledge, the calamity-carrier comet has the shape resembling a relatively long-tailed incandescent fire emitting a red light. That is why the term *pulung* is very popular in this region of research. They talk more frequently about the *pulung* than the comet, *teluh brojo*, and other glowing celestial bodies at night.

In everyday conversations, the *pulung* carrying calamity is also called *pulung gandul*. The appearance of the *pulung gantung* or *pulung gandul* in the air is unpredictable because it belongs to supernatural and mysterious beings. When the *pulung gantung* emerges, it is interpreted if it looks for people experiencing empty mind. There are some factors that cause people to experience empty mind, among others, (1) the poverty; (2) suffering from chronic and non-recoverable illness; (3) being

neglected; (4) non-harmonious households and infidelities; (5) disappointment; (6) broken heart from the person they love.

According to mythically minded people having oriented in myth, people experiencing empty mind are easily accessible by the *pulung gantung*. The idea of this *pulung gantung* leads the people concerned to commit suicide. According to some people that had failed to commit suicide, they did not realize if they had done an act or action when tying their neck with a rope at the time of hanging themselves.

A Realistic View of Thoughts on Suicide

Among the realistic-minded people, they respond to suicide here without connecting it to the *pulung gantung* myth. They believe that people commit suicide because of an unresolved problem. This happens because no one is involved in their communication.

The most important factor causing people to fail communicating that lead them to suicidal action is that they are abandoned by their family. The research of Darmaningtyas (2002) indicates that when more and more people migrate, the suicide rate in the region increases as it happened in the past two decades.

This happens because no people responded to the victims when they want to talk to while alive. On that account, the messages they originally wanted to convey in person were finally (1) written in the form of a testament; or (2) partially passed direct messages to neighbors of right and left side of the house before committing suicide. Besides, some of them did not have time to leave the testament, either verbally or in writing because the victims have introvert character.

In connection with the statement above, the suicide in this region is triggered by loneliness and the loosening of family relationship so that the integration level of household life becomes low. This kind of household situation leads to the consequences of egoistical suicide.

CONCLUSION

According to mystically minded people, they associate suicide with a supernatural being called the *pulung gantung*. People will not commit suicide if they do not fall off the *pulung gantung* even though experiencing various problems in life. The discourse of getting possessed by the *pulung gantung* becomes a justification for people committing suicide so as to cover up their family's disgrace.

On the contrary, the view of realistically minded people says that people commit suicide is not due to getting possessed by *pulung gantung*, but they experienced communication failure in their lifetime. This failure can be observed in the testament or verbal messages entrusted to their neighbors on both sides of their house. This means that suicide committed by the people serves as a message carrier to their family and community.

In other words, the suicide as a symbol is interpreted as a communication failure experienced by the suicide victims in their lifetime.

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