

From Acute Pain to Intense Elation: The Psychological Dynamics of Five Individuals Who Experienced Spirit Possession

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Abstraks

Kesurupan merupakan fenomena yang terjadi di berbagai kebudayaan di dunia, namun relatif jarang diteliti. Belum ada konsensus tentang etiologi kesurupan. Tokoh-tokoh psikodinamika menyebutnya 'histeria'; para pendukung teori disosiatif menyebutnya proses disosiatif; para pakar antropologi menyebutnya fenomena yang dibentuk budaya. Dalam penelitian ini, peneliti mengajukan gagasan bahwa kesurupan dapat diklasifikasikan menjadi empat kategori yang berbeda, yakni kesurupan patologis, kesurupan religius, kesurupan kuratif, dan kesurupan hiburan. Penulis menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman dan dinamika psikologis lima individu yang mengalami kesurupan. Penulis menggunakan tes proyektif (BAUM, DAP, HTP) untuk menunjang eksplorasi dinamika psikologis kelima partisipan. Data penelitian dan hasil kajian literatur menunjukkan bahwa kesurupan patologis, religius, kuratif, dan hiburan merupakan jenis kesurupan yang berbeda. Partisipan yang mengalami kesurupan patologis melaporkan rasa sakit psikologis yang akut saat kesurupan. Eksplorasi riwayat keluarga menunjukkan tipe chaotic-disengaged. Partisipan yang mengalami kesurupan religius (dikuasai Roh Kudus) melaporkan ekstase spiritual, yang dicirikan oleh sukacita yang sangat intens. Partisipan yang mengalami kesurupan hiburan melaporkan episode kesurupan yang dipicu oleh musik dan ritual, yang penyebabnya diatribusikan ke makhluk supernatural. Secara umum, hasil penelitian mendukung perspektif bahwa kesurupan adalah mekanisme untuk mengekspresikan kebutuhan dan hasrat psikologis yang terpendam dan tidak terpenuhi dalam kehidupan nyata. Penjelasan berdasarkan perspektif tunggal—misalnya hanya menggunakan perspektif fisiologis atau satu perspektif teoretik—akan menimbulkan "materialisme medis", yang dikhawatirkan William James. Hasil penelitian ini mendukung suatu perspektif yang holistik, yang menyatakan bahwa kesurupan merupakan interaksi dinamis antara kebutuhan psikologis yang terpendam, frustrasi, hasrat, dan representasi keyakinan sosioreligius para partisipan.

Kata kunci: kesurupan patologis, kesurupan religius, kesurupan kuratif, kesurupan hiburan, fenomena disosiatif, perubahan kesadaran

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Spirit possession is a phenomenon that is as old as history itself. The phenomenon has been described in a Hebrew text written around 620 BC (Lukefahr, 2008). The first person credited as having compiled scientific report about spirit possession was Paracelsus (1493-1541), who reported a mysterious outbreak, called *the Dancing Plague*, which spread throughout Europe during 15th and 16th century. This plague caused people to involuntarily, until they were fatigued or even died. People were afflicted simply by looking at or hearing the sound of the dancing people. In one documented case, around 1100 person were dancing simultaneously (see Donaldson, Cavanagh, & Rankin, 1997).

The previously mentioned case was not a unique medieval phenomenon. Five centuries after the Dancing Plague, Cortés and Gatti (1984) reported a similar case of "Dancing Plague", which occurred in an American high school (for detailed report, see Cortés & Gatti, 1984, pp. 154-159). There is a striking similarity between the case of *Dancing Plague* and the case presented by Cortés and Gatti (1984). During both cases, people "dancing" out of control, and the symptom spread to other people. Decades of research had pointed out that this phenomenon occurred in all parts of the globe. The phenomenon of spirit possession was found in the Philippines (Bulatao, 1980, 1982, 1986), Hong Kong (Southard & Southard, 1986), Japan (Miyamoto, 2006), Singapore (Ng, 2000), Malaysia (Razali, 1999), India (Basso, 2006; Castillo, 1994a, 1994b; Mattoo, Gupta, Lobana, & Bedi, 2002; Sethi & Bargava, 2009; Varma, Bouri, & Wig, 1981); Israel (Somer, 2004; Witztum, Buchbinder & van der Hart, 1990; Somer & Saadon, 2000; Bar-El, Durst, Katz, Zislin, Strauss, & Knobler, (2000); various parts of Indonesia (Hollan, 2000; Bubandt, 2009; Sobary, 1997;

Springate, 2009; Stange, 1979; Lemelson & Suryani, 2006); Nigeria (Ejizu, 1991); Zambia (Oger, 1996); Uganda (Van Duijl, Cardena, & De Jong, 2005); Finland (Björkqvist, 1981); Italy (Ferracuti, Sacco, & Lazari, 1996); England (Cartledge, 1999); Northern America (Cortés & Gatti, 1984; Malony, 1985; Bartholomew & Sirois, 2000; Taves, 2006); Central America (Hayes, 2006; Ferrándiz, 2004; Koss-Chionino, 2003; Motta, 2005); New Zealand (Kavan, 2004); Fiji (Hoare, 2004); Tonga (McGrath, 2003).

In Indonesia, spirit possession was commonly called *kesurupan* or *kerasukan*. According to the official dictionary of Bahasa Indonesia, *kesurupan* is defined as "possessed by evil spirits" (Tim Penyusun Kamus Pusat Pembinaan dan Pengembangan Bahasa, 1989). Clifford Geertz (1960), an anthropologist, stated that the word *surup* in *kesurupan* referred to the time of dusk (*surup*) when spirits (*lelembut*) roamed the air. PPDGJ-III (Maslim, 2003)—the manual of mental disorders used in Indonesia—classified spirit possession as dissociative (conversion) phenomenon. DSM-IV (APA, 1994) classified it as dissociative disorder. Some psychodynamic-oriented researchers called it hysteria (see Cortes & Gatti, 1984; Mattoo et. al., 2002; Sethi & Bargava, 2009); some dissociative theory-oriented researchers (see Bulatao, 1980, 1982, 1986; Castillo, 1994a, 1994b, 1995; Seligman & Kirmayer, 2008) called it dissociative phenomenon, and some anthropologists (see Geertz, 1960; Stange, 1979; Hoare, 2004; Hayes, 2006) called it a culture-shaped phenomenon served as a social protest to express tensions and negative feelings constrained by cultural norms. Some writers (see Heaney, 2008; Amorth, 2010; Baglio, 2011) put it in a continuum of preternatural phenomenon (phenomenon that involved

unrecognized natural laws) to supernatural phenomenon (phenomenon that falls outside the realm of natural sciences). Such debate can go a long way, however one fact is clear: *such disagreement over basic terms is a reminder that we are in the presence of culture* (Kleinman & Good, 1985: 3). (Indeed, the English word *possession* is sometimes considered as indicating the focus of Western worldview toward materialism—see Johnson & Keller, 2006). Therefore, research on spirit possession should not treat cultures as something constant (see Kleinman & Good, 1985: 492).

The author identified four theoretical perspectives often used by scientists in analyzing the etiology of spirit possession. Those perspectives are dissociative, psychodynamic, anthropology, and biology. Dissociative theory proposed that human has multiple consciousnesses; both *primary* and *secondary* (or alternative) consciousness. The primary consciousness is the active, objective, consciousness. It is the consciousness that most human spent their lives with. However, certain traumatic events may cause an individual to create a secondary consciousness. For example, during abuse, a child may create a secondary consciousness to escape from the acute pain of reality. This secondary consciousness may persist in the individual's entire life, although it tends to hide in the background; dominated by the primary consciousness. Nevertheless, during the waning of the primary consciousness (for instance when the individual was under hypnosis), the hidden consciousnesses may emerge from their deep recesses; this process is perceived as spirit possession according to the cultural worldview of the perceivers (see, for example, Bulatao, 1980, 1982, 1986; Seligman & Kirmayer, 2008; Castillo, 1994a, 1994b). Dissociative theory is the theory that is used by the majority of

modern mental health authority, including DSM-IV. The second perspective is the psychodynamic perspective, which considers spirit possession as hysterical phenomenon involving the resurgence of repressed impulses (refer to Cortés & Gatti, 1984; Buss, 1966; Varma et al., 1981; Mattoo et al., 2002; Sethi & Bargava, 2009 for some examples). The third perspective is the anthropological perspective, which views spirit possession as culturally bound phenomenon. Scientists using anthropological perspective usually avoid labels such as "hysteria" or "dissociation". Instead, they focused on description of observable behaviors and relations between the possessed individuals and cultural influences (see Motta, 2005; Stange, 1979; Hayes, 2006; Bubandt, 2009 for some examples). The fourth perspective is the biological perspective, which offers effort to explain spirit possession on biological basis. This perspective usually employs brain-imaging instruments, such as the EEG, and produce research findings based on neurophysiological perspective (for example, Ahlberg, 1981; Wikström, 1981; Björkqvist, 1981).

The authors of this article proposed that spirit possession can be classified into four categories, namely pathological possession, curative possession, religious possession, and entertainment possession. Literature review supported this idea. Contrary to what many people may think, some possessions were actually ego-syntonic (beneficial to the person's ego) and were voluntarily enacted. Examples are cases of spirit mediums (see Bubandt, 2009; Taves, 2006) or cases of trance dancers during public shows (Springate, 2009; Stange, 1979; Somer & Saadon, 2000). However, during literature review, only a single article offers effort to categorize cases of possessions. This article was a case

study report written by Rebecca Basso (2006) who conducted research in Orissa, India. She classified spirit possession into three categories, namely pathological, curative, and neutral (without meaning) possession. Hence, the author developed the idea that possession can be categorized into four domains, namely pathological, religious, curative, and entertainment possession. *Pathological possession* is a state of possession that causes stress or impairment to the individual. Pathological possession occurs (a) involuntarily, and (b) outside accepted cultural norms where the individual resides (Maslim, 2003; APA, 1994; Ng, 2000). *Religious possession* is a state of possession that occurs within scopes of religious practices and is accepted as normal practice within the scope of that religion. An example is “possession by the Holy Spirit”, a phenomenon occurred within Pentecostalism or Charismatic Christian tradition. This phenomenon was closely linked with *glossolalia*, or speaking in tongues, where individuals believe themselves to be able to speak, or pray, in unknown languages (Kavan, 2004; Cartledge, 1999; Malony, 1985). *Curative possession* is a state of possession voluntarily enacted for curative purposes, such as healing people or giving advices. This phenomenon is found in many cultures, for example in the United States (Taves, 2006), Brazil (Hayes, 2006), India (Basso, 2006), Ternate (Bubandt, 2009), Venezuela (Ferrándiz, 2004), Uganda (Van Duijl et al., 2005), Java (Sobary, 1997; Koentjoroningrat, 1985), Puerto Rico (Koss-Chionino, 2003); and Tonga (McGrath, 2003). It usually involves mediums or spiritists. *Entertainment possession* is a state of possession voluntarily enacted for public shows or entertainment purposes. There are some examples in Indonesia, such as *klèdèk*, *jathilan*, *gendruwon* (Geertz, 1960: 296; Stange, 1979; Springate, 2009) and the

Torajan *ma'maro* (Hollan, 2000). Eli Somer and his colleague (Somer & Saadon, 2000) wrote research report about Stambali, an ethnic dance practiced among Tunisian immigrants in Israel, used to ward off evil spirits. During trances, the dancers—always females—rip off their clothes and perform erotic movements. In Indonesia, *jathilan*—mythical horse-dancing—has existed for generations, probably for several centuries (see Koentjoroningrat, 1985 for further information). The origin of *jathilan* is unclear; it is probably a mixture of several older folk arts (Koentjoroningrat, 1985). For further details on *jathilan*, the readers are suggested to refer to the classic work of Koentjoroningrat (1985), Geertz (1960), and Stange (1979); or to the more contemporary articles, such as Springate (2009).

Possession creates controversy, debate, and warm discussion in three domains: ontology, epistemology, and axiology. In ontological domain, the essence of possession is still a polemic (for example, whether possession is a mental or supernatural phenomenon—see Heaney, 2008: 61-63). In epistemological domain, scientists debate the proper approach to analyze possession (see Castillo, 1994a, 1994b; which compares dissociative and psychodynamic perspective). In axiological domain, the problem centers on the issue of intervention, which directly influences patient's well-being (such as “is medical intervention superior to symbolic ritual in treating intervention?”—see Razali, 1999). These entire problems cannot be addressed within the scope of this paper. However, this paper offers to contribute data regarding to the ongoing discussion of the psychological dynamics of the victims of spirit possession. The research questions were presented as such.

1. How is the psychological dynamics of individuals who experienced spirit possession within pathological, religious, entertainment, and curative context?
2. How is the “*rasa*” (*essence of feeling, sensation*) experienced during the four kinds of possession?

Method

The methodological approach used in this research was *multiple case studies*, or sometimes called *collective case study* (see Yin, 1994). This approach was supplemented by phenomenological analysis to explore the essence (“*rasa*”) of *kesurupan*, which was one of the initial aims of this research. The author also incorporated projective tests, namely BAUM, Draw-A-Person (DAP), and House-Tree-Person (HTP), to assist the exploration of the participants’ psychological dynamics. Sampling technique was snowball sampling (see Patton, 1990).

The author started this research with minimal resources (literature and information) regarding cases of possession. By the use of “snowballing”, the author progressively gathered sources of information, such as literature and addresses of certain informants. The author met all the participants via the network of information built during the process of this research.

Initially six individuals participated in this research, but one participant (Rani) resigned from the study in October 2010, saying that she cannot bear to reveal the painful story of her family. The author respected her decision to withdraw herself from the study. (The conscious, voluntary decision to participate in this study was confirmed by participants’ signature on the informed consent. The other five participants—Ita, Anton, Doni, Nita, and Pak

Naryo—signed the informed consent). The author compiled four inclusion criteria; each criteria represents different case of possession (pathological, religious, entertainment, curative).

- (a) Inclusion criteria for participants who experienced pathological possession were created based on PPDGJ-III and DSM-IV descriptions of possession disorder (e.g. the individual experienced involuntary possession state which caused embarrassment or significant negative affect, and which caused impairment to the individual’s daily functioning). The author found two participants in this category (Ita and Anton).
- (b) Inclusion criteria for participants who experienced religious possession were focused on individuals who experience “possession by the Holy Spirit”, and experience “*glossolalia*” (speaking in tongues). The author found two participants in this category (Doni and Nita).
- (c) Inclusion criteria for participants who experience entertainment possession were focused on individuals who experience spirit possession, which was voluntarily enacted as folk art or public entertainment. Several Indonesian folk arts have been known to involve possession trance, such as *klèdèk*, *jathilan*, *gendruwon* (see Geertz, 1960: 296). However, in this research, the author focused on *jathilan*, which still exists as a folk art and public entertainment. The author found one participant in this category (Pak Naryo).
- (d) Inclusion criteria for participants who experience curative possession were focused on individuals who experience possession in order to gain magical or supernatural abilities, such as healing people, giving words of advice, or

giving predictions. The author was unable to find any participant for this category.

Data collecting began at January 2010 until August 2011. The author used semi-structured interviews, observations, and the administration of projective tests (BAUM, DAP, HTP) to obtain data from the participants. Interviews were recorded under participants' permission. Projective tests were also administrated under participants' permission. Among the five participants, Doni refused the projective test, saying that he was "normal", despite the author's explanation that the test was merely an assessment of individual traits. Interviews and observations were conducted in participants' homes, boarding houses, churches, and campuses. There were four to five formal meetings with every participant; and up to ten informal meetings with the participants. During informal meetings, the author did not explicitly conduct the data collecting (interviews). Many times, informal meetings consisted only of trivial talking or having lunch together. Yet, in many instances, these informal meetings often provided valuable data. These data were memorized or documented in a field note, which then

were brought back or reiterated in the formal meetings, where the author specifically notified the participants about the purpose of the research and the process of data collecting.

Data analysis was preceded by descriptions of individual cases. Each case was treated separately as if they are distinct topics (see Yin, 1994). Each case description consisted of description of participant's life history, developmental history, and the occurrence of possessions experienced by the participant. Case description was followed by phenomenological analysis to reveal the themes according to the data. Finally, the author narrated the participant's psychological dynamics according to the case description, themes unveiled from the phenomenological analysis, literature review, the author's own interpretation, and projective test findings. Each case was presented separately, starting from Ita, Anton, Doni, Nita, and Pak Naryo. After each case has been presented separately, the author presents cross-case comparison and general analysis.

Research Findings

The entire findings will not be de-

Table 1
List of Participants

Name (pseudonym)	Age (years)	Education	Marital status	Vocation	Domicile	Type of Possession
Ita	28	College graduate	Single	Graduate student	Bengkulu	Pathological possession
Anton	24	College graduate	Single	Entrepreneur (operating a fried chicken vendor)	Yogyakarta	Pathological possession
Doni	24	College graduate	Single	Musician; church activist; banking officer	Yogyakarta	Religious possession
Nita	25	College graduate	Single	Graduate student; judicial officer	Yogyakarta	Religious possession
Pak Naryo	68	Elementary school graduate	Married with three children	Farmer; "pawang" jathilan	Magelang	Entertainment possession

scribed in details here. In this section, the author presents three exemplar cases from Ita (pathological possession), Doni (religious possession), and Pak Naryo (entertainment possession). This will be followed by a report of cross-case analysis, where the author discusses the four categories of possessions.

Individual Cases: Ita, Doni, & Pak Naryo

Participant "Ita". When the author met Ita, she was a 28 years old female from Bengkulu, Sumatra. She was born in a backwater village in Palembang, Sumatra; third child of five siblings. She spent her childhood days in a remote village, living with her grandmother; meanwhile her parents lived in Bengkulu. During her teenage years, she moved to her parents' house in Bengkulu. She has a degree in *dakwah Islam* (Islamic evangelization).

Ita had lived apart from her father since her birth. She saw her father only twice a year, when he returned home, bringing money for the family. When Ita had finished elementary school, her mother, her older brother, older sister, and youngest sister abruptly moved to Bengkulu. Ita said she was "neglected" (*ditinggal sendiri*). Her mother only left her some new uniforms. This sudden separation shocked Ita. She asked, "Why I was neglected? What's wrong with me?". She never knew the reason; all she knew was that her mother and her siblings suddenly moved away, leaving her with her aging grandmother and one of her younger brother, who suffered a harelip and was unable to communicate. Ita's junior high school years turned out to be difficult years. Now that her father *never* returned home, money was even harder to get. Her neighbors often mocked her, "Where are your parents? Didn't they love you, or what?" (transcript I: 904-907). During the

end of every semester, when parents supposedly pick the students' school progress report, Ita was anxious: "Who will pick my report"? These problems became significant stressors for her. After finishing her junior high school, she decided to reunite with her parents. Against all odds, she bravely travelled alone to Bengkulu, searching for her parents' house. When she finally found her parents' house, she exclaimed, "Think of it! I *do* have parents! Yet for many years, this is the *first* time I ever saw my parents' house!". Yet after having reunited with her family, she found out that her older brother has cut any contact with the family (apparently he joined a radical Islamic sect) and her older sister was diagnosed with schizophrenia. Moreover, her strict, authoritarian father forced her to help him in the plantation (her father owns a coconut plantation). For example, Ita was forced to bring heavy sacks of fertilizer alone, using a motorcycle. Ita said that her father did not bother to know how she would manage the task; he just wanted to have it done. To make matters worse, Ita's youngest sister dropped out from college and she did not have the courage to tell her parents. Ita felt responsible to help her sister, and together, the two siblings plotted to move Ita's sister to another college; without their father's knowing. During these times of stress, Ita experienced her first (and only) case of possession.

The occurrence of possession began in one late noon, when Ita was sitting alone in her room, reading her journal. During that time, Ita was experiencing significant stress. She was reading passages that reminded her about her "suffering". This made her feel even more depressed. During the following night, by coincidence, she witnessed two female neighbors experiencing hysterical possession trance. In

the next day, again while alone in her room, she was reading an Islamic "sad" comic book. It was during the reading that she began to feel "weird" (*aneh*). She became afraid and asked her friends for help. During this time, "dialogues" began to sprawl in Ita's mind. She perceived a male genie wooing her, talking to her, offering help. She refused, believing that uniting with a genie is a grave sin ("*syirik*"). Ita felt as if the genie was trying to enter her body from her toes. She fought hard against the "genie". Indeed, she said that the fighting was "the most painful battle" and it was "a battle between life and death". She experienced dramatic recovery when she met two distinct people. The first one was "Mbak Nuki", her senior classmate, and the second was "Pak Dosen", her college instructor. Ita said that both people "understood" her (*mengerti apa yang aku rasakan*), empathized with her, felt her pain, and did not reject her belief that she was possessed by a genie. Both people also gave her advices that gave enormous psychological strength to her. The entire possession episode lasted three days. After having been "freed" from the genie, Ita never experienced any similar phenomenon.

Participant "Doni". When the author met Doni, he was a 24 years old male Catholic, the oldest of two siblings. His father had passed away several years ago; leaving him with his mother and his little sister. However, the family has considerable financial asset and managed to attain comfortable socioeconomic status. Several months after graduation, he was accepted as a financial officer in a national bank. Besides his daily job, Doni plays violin for religious and secular activities. Doni is a member of *New Judah* (a pseudonym), a Charismatic Catholic movement. The movement became controversial because

the leaders supposedly taught doctrines that were different from, or in some cases against, Catholic official teachings. Several Catholic Church leaders already contemplating to dismiss the movement but reconciliation happened between the Church leaders and the leaders of the movement. Doni has been an active member of the movement since his junior high school. He is always neatly dressed. Overall, he has a stiff demeanor. He rarely talks much but when he did, his tone of voice was mostly flat and monotone. However, when discussing topics such as faith, God, religion, the Scripture, Pentecostalism, his demeanor changed abruptly. He would talk with apparent enthusiasm; wave his hands, his tone of voice changed unexpectedly. It seems that spirituality is an integral part in Doni's worldview. In his family, Doni is the only one who became member of the New Judah.

Doni's relation with other family members (his mother and his sister) seemed to be distant and stiff. For example, the author observed that on one occasion, Doni left his house without saying anything to his mother and sister who were watching television together in the living room. Doni once told the author that he is a very introverted person. He was "baptized in the Spirit" when he was in junior high school. Since then, he became a devout member of a Charismatic Catholic movement.

Doni considered the possession by the Holy Spirit as a holy and highly desirable phenomenon. He described the process of uniting with the Holy Spirit as a three-stage journey into the Holy Temple (the temple built by King Solomon of Israel in around 10 BC). During the first stage, which he called "the front yard" (*pelataran*), the person is "still standing in the front yard of the Great Temple". He re-

tained consciousness, “still be able to notice the person in his right or left” (*masih bisa lihat kanan-kiri*), but he began to feel the “presence of God” (*merasakan hadirat Tuhan*). During this stage, the worship musicians played brisk, merry songs. During the second stage, which Doni called “entering the Temple” (*memasuki bait Kudus*); music slowed down. The worship leader led the audience to deeper meditative state, for example by reciting Scripture or praying melodically. “The presence of God” became stronger; it is “like breathing in the Spirit” (*bernafas dalam Roh*). The audience “drinks from the Spirit” (*minum dari Roh*) until they are “refreshed” (*disegarkan*). Finally, during the final stage, which Doni called “entering the Holy of the Holiest” (*memasuki Ruang Maha Kudus*), he reported intimate union with the Holy Spirit. This was the moment of *unio mystica*; when God and man becomes one. Doni said that during this stage, the person lost awareness of his or her surroundings. During these stage also, a person may “hear God’s voice” and gets “clairvoyance ability” (*hikmat marifat*). The person may feel intense elation that he or she will cry in joy. Doni said that a trained person can “jump into” (*meloncat*) the third stage without the need to pass through the initial two stages. Therefore, the person may “feel the presence of God” and experiencing immense elation almost everywhere, anywhere. To illustrate this, Doni gave example when he suddenly experienced “the presence of God” when he was riding his motorcycle during a trip to campus. Uncontrollably, he sobbed. This sudden ecstasy had happened in several occasions, even when Doni was working on his classroom assignment. To describe his “possession by the Holy Spirit” experience, Doni repeatedly used metaphors about water. For example, he “drinks from the river of Spirit” (*minum dari sungai Roh*

Kudus), he “drinks the anointing oil that he received in the Holy of the Holiest” (*minum urapan dari Ruang Maha Kudus*), and he “dives into the river of the Spirit” (*menyelam ke sungai Roh Kudus*). On the other side, when he felt he was far from God, he said he was “dry” (*kering*). Doni said that the communication with God was a two-sided communication: he talked to God, and God talked to him. Sometimes, he reported that God called him “My son” (*anakKu*). This made him cry joyfully. He felt as if he is “walking through impossibility” (*berjalan menembus kemustahilan*); that God will “divide the Red Sea” (*membelah Laut Merah*) before him.

Participant “Pak Naryo”. The author met Pak Naryo, a veteran *jathilan* dancer, with the help of Dini, an informant. Pak Naryo was a 68 years old farmer. He is also a former *jathilan* dancer and *pawang* (sorcerer). He moved with such agility that belied his advancing age. Although Pak Naryo was no longer active as a dancer, the people of his village still consider him a “powerful” (*sakti*) man. Occasionally, the people of the village asked him to cure an illness or to find lost objects. He started dancing in 1962, and had been a legendary dancer ever since. Together with another legendary dancer, the late Pak Sukardi (also a pseudonym), Pak Naryo became an icon for *jathilan* dancers in the area.

The village where Pak Naryo spent his entire life was a traditional Javanese village (for discussion of traditional Javanese village, see Koentjoroningrat, 1985). In the village, Javanese mysticism (*kejawen*) has been practiced for ages. Even today, young people in that village still practice *kejawen* (the syncretism of Hinduism, Islam, and animism) such as walking (*nglampah*) to the Southern Ocean during the first day of the Javanese month of Sura. *Kejawen* with more Islamic overtone, such as *tahlilan*

(ritual praying for the deceased) and *ken-duri* (ritual feast) still flourish. Belief in supernatural powers gained through asceticism (mediation, fasting, and such) is still widely spread.

According to Pak Naryo, *dhemit* was the entity behind his supposed magical powers. (For more references about *dhemit*, the readers are suggested to read the works of Geertz, [1960] and Koentjoringrat, [1985]). Pak Naryo stated that ever since he started dancing, the *dhemits* that possessed himself and his troupe were always the same *dhemits*. There were three *dhemits*; their names were Raden Mas Subroto ("Raden Mas" literally means "The Golden Prince"), Juminah (the only female *dhemit* among the three) and Simbah Joyo ("Simbah" literally means "Old Man"). Subroto often possessed Pak Naryo, although sometimes the other two *dhemits* joined in possessing Pak Naryo. On several occasions when Subroto "has another business" (*sedang ada keperluan lain*) and cannot attend to the show, the other two *dhemits* will replace him to possess Pak Naryo.

According to Pak Naryo, possession by *dhemit* was always preceded and ended by rituals. The ritual involved the chanting of *mantra* (a spell to summon the *dhemits*) and the offering of *sesajen* (an offertory consists of flowers and waters). During, or sometimes after the ritual, dancers became possessed. During possession trance, they apparently lost their awareness of their immediate surroundings. However, they were able to dance and follow the musical rhythm. Their pain tolerance also increased. In several occasions, they performed the act of eating glasses or rice straws. To end the trance, the *pawang* would chant a certain *mantra* to expel or banish the *dhemits*. The most common *mantra* was "Here I give you some supply,

now please go home" (*Sekarang kamu saya beri bekal, cepatlah pulang*). The *pawang* would also puff the dancers (as if one puffed birthday candles). This ritual brought the dancers back to consciousness. In very rare occasions, where rituals failed to bring the dancers back to the consciousness, the dancers might "run amok" (*mengamuk*)—sometimes acting out aggressively, uttering harsh and vulgar words. Stange (1979) has documented one of these rare cases during an observation in Salatiga, Central Java. However, the author has not personally encountered such cases yet.

Cross-case Comparison

Pathological possession. Both Ita and Anton have the tendency to "bury" problems. They rarely self-disclosed to another people, either because they did not have anyone to talk to, or because they had difficulty expressing themselves assertively. Yet their lives were marked by significant stressors over long periods of time. According to psychodynamic perspective, the repressed feelings and emotions did not disappear. They were burdening the ego; slowly corroding the ego and depleting the psychic energies (Buss, 1966: 80). The repressed burdens were stored like a time bomb, waiting for an event when the ego is ruptured. The precipitating moment need not to be a spectacular event. It can be as simple as reading a journal, such as in Ita's case. In Ita's case, the precipitating event (reading a journal) might have triggered an episode of depression, which was manifested as a possession syndrome, according to Ita's worldview of genies and angels. Both Ita and Anton also showed discontent toward themselves and their situations. They did not like the way things are; but they felt powerless to change the situation. Therefore, possession

became a temporary flight to the fantasy world. However, their partial awareness—that they were doing very embarrassing things—made the possession pathological so that they fought very hard, “a struggle between life and death”, to recover from the possession state.

Both Ita and Anton have family members who had previous experiences of psychotic illness and depression. Ita’s sister suffered from schizophrenia. Anton’s mother experienced several episodes of depression. She also experienced two episodes of “spirit possession”; once when Anton was about twelve years old, and the other one occurred shortly after Anton experienced “spirit possession” during his college years. Some researchers (e.g. Mattoo et. al, 2002) suggested a relationship between familial histories of psychotic disorder with the subsequent emergence of psychotic symptoms in *another* member of the family.

One of the most notable characteristic of pathological possession, as reported by the participants of this study, was the acute psychological pain they felt during the possession trance. Ita felt the pain as “the most excruciating pain of all” (*paling menyakitkan*), “the struggle of life and death” (*pertarungan hidup dan mati*), “the greatest tribulation” (*ujian terbesar*). Anton felt the pain as “the most excruciating” (*sakitnya minta ampun*). This pain was linked into two elements. The first one is the partial awareness of the participants that they were about to do very embarrassing things. For example, Ita was frightened that she would “strip her clothes off” and “babbling uncontrollably” when completely possessed by the genie. (During that time of possession, she was a high-ranking official of one large Islamic students’ community in Bengkulu). Besides, she took major in *Dakwah Islam*. Thus, be-

ing possessed, in her view, would greatly disgrace her. Therefore, she tried to fight back, concentrating very hard so that the genie would not possess her. Hence, she felt the struggle to hold her consciousness as “the struggle of life and death”. Anton experienced similar psychological embarrassment when he was partially aware that he “walked on four legs, like a tiger”. He thought that he was “the most foolish man in the world” (*goblok sak’angkate*), and “was like a lunatic” (*seperti orang kenthir*). Both participants experienced significant embarrassment because they felt that they have lost their control to behave normally in front of other people.

The second element that caused acute psychological pain was the incessant concentration mustered by the participants to resist being possessed; although this effort often proved futile. Ita stated that the concentration was “intense”; that sweat running through her body; her fists clenched hard. Anton said that many times he felt he could never be freed from the entities that possessed him.

Before entering possession trance (perceiving the supernatural entities’ attempt to enter their body and took control of their behavior), both Ita and Anton felt physical symptoms such as sweating, dizziness, and *masuk angin* (a symptom like common cold). A number of studies have described similar symptoms experienced by possession victims, such as profuse sweating, vomiting, spasms, difficulties of breathing, coughing, and/or insomnia (see Ng, 2000; Ferracuti, 1996; Bartholomew & Sirois, 2000; Mattoo et. al, 2002).

There were also some secondary gains apparently, or unconsciously, seek by the participants. During possession, Anton became a very different in person. In any other days, he was known as a boy who “never protests”, “never complains”,

“very shy”, “very reserved”, and “rarely talks”. Anton’s aunt (whom he has been living with for the last ten years) said that Anton is “a good boy” (*anak baik*) because he never protest. “He always ate what I served”; the aunt said, beaming. However, during possession state, Anton behaved like a completely different person. He became very aggressive. He would topple furniture, threw chairs (even to his aunt), broke windows pane with his fists (so that he hurt his own fists), screaming and cursing the people who prayed for him, and acted like a tyrant who commands everyone in his sight. Ita experienced the same phenomenon. During possession state, she felt she was able to command people. Indeed, she ordered her friends to do her biddings, for example to tear down pictures of Indian celebrities from the wall of her dormitory. Projective tests showed that the participants have difficulty to express their feelings. Life history also showed that the participants had little control of their lives. Ita’s life was marked by separation, conflict, and repressive authoritarianism from his father; causing her often feeling hopeless and neglected. Anton’s life was also marked by separation, feelings of unworthiness; of being unable to reach or accomplish his ideals. For both of these participants, possession served as a means to blow out steam; to express unfulfilled wishes or psychological needs. It was no coincidence that the genie which attempted to “penetrate” Ita’s body (*memasuki diriku*) was a male genie. Ita perceived that the male genie “woos” (*merayu-rayu*) her; attempting to “penetrate” her body—a sexual connotation. This interpretation comes from the fact that Ita, at her age of 28 years old, had never been involved in any romantic relationships. It is also pertinent to point out that the spirits who possessed Anton were all “kings, nobles, warriors”, “all glorious” (*semuanya berpangkat*).

Specifically, Anton mentioned that he was possessed by Nayagenggong, Ontoseno, and Brawijaya. These are legendary figures within Javanese folklore and history. Apparently, possession served as means to attain unfulfilled wishes or ideals—albeit in an unrealistic sense.

Both participants experienced complete recovery from their pathological possession through *social support* and *acceptance* by person whom they trust. When they met such person, the effect was dramatic. Ita felt greatly relieved when she met “Mbak Nuki” (her female senior in the campus) and “Pak Dosen” (one of her professors). Both of these figures did not contradict Ita’s belief that she was possessed by genie. Ita said that the two figures “acknowledge her condition”. Both figures also gave similar advices that greatly improved Ita’s condition. Mbak Nuki said to Ita that “the genie will not do any harm because God does not grant permission”. In a similar way, “Pak Dosen” said to Ita that “without God’s permission, the genie will not be able to do any harm”. Ita, who has been raised in a devout Islamic environment, believes that God is Almighty and Merciful. If such Almighty God does not permit His beings to be harmed by genies, she reasoned, then she should be all-right. This understanding reconstructed Ita’s cognitive scheme, replacing her old scheme that she was a hopeless victim of the genie. She never experienced possession ever since.

Anton experienced significant recovery when his aunt brought him to “Pak Pur”, a traditional healer in Bantul, Yogyakarta. Anton said that this healer never contradicts his belief in the supernatural world. Yet at the same time, the healer gives simple, practical advices that brought Anton back to reality. For example, the healer told Anton to “listen to mu-

sic, get some friends, do sport, do breathing relaxation". Anton apparently followed the advice. In fact, he subsequently dated a girl. He said that when he managed to get to the girl's house, suddenly he feel that "he has been completely recovered" (*saya sudah sembuh*). He never experienced possession ever since.

Some scientists (for example Razali, 1999; Castillo, 1995) pointed that there were positive relationship between possession victims' trust toward their healers and the efficacy of the therapy. Furthermore, they pointed out the need to realize the difference between "disease" and "illness"; and thereby, to give "curing" and "healing" accordingly. "Disease" is an objective definition or description of pathological symptoms, such as those described in DSM-IV. Meanwhile, "illness" is subjective; it is the "clinical reality" of the patients (see Castillo, 1995). Treating a "disease" involves the method of "curing", meanwhile treating an "illness" involves the method of "healing". Healing may be symbolic or religious in nature, or both. Either symbolic or religious healing is not necessarily inferior to medical curing. However, each therapeutic mode has its own proper appliance. Possession cases that involve biological disturbance, such as the dramatic change of catecholamine in the brain (as experienced by schizophrenic patients) will clearly require medical intervention. The challenge of the practitioners is to discern cases that require medical intervention from cases that represent the possessed individual's worldview, which can be managed using symbolic intervention (see Castillo, 1995).

Religious possession

Both Doni and Nita—the two participants who experienced religious possession—considers "possessed by the Holy Spirit" as a holy and highly desirable phe-

nomenon. In this context, the possession cannot be considered pathological. One important finding is that both participants believed strongly that speaking in tongues—the ability gained through the participation in the "Baptism of the Spirit"—*must* be practiced and rehearsed through continuous practices. Without practice, one will lose his or her fluency in tongue speaking. The saying "use it or lose it" do apply here.

The important metaphors found in both Doni's and Nita's narratives were the metaphors of water. Doni felt that he was "submerging, swimming in the river of the Holy Spirit" (*menyelam, berenang di sungai Roh Kudus*), "drinking from the water of the Holy Spirit" (*minum air Roh Kudus*), and was "refreshed" (*disegarkan*) thereafter. Nita felt "refreshing flows" (*aliran-aliran yang menyejukan*). When feeling far from God, Doni said he felt "dry" (*kering*). The metaphors of water—or water-like substances—are often used in the Bible, and usually are used in positive contexts (such as baptism, purification, healing, and anointing). Doni and Nita read the Bible daily, and it is highly possible that they accommodated metaphor of water found in the Bible into their possession experience.

It is important to note that the phenomenon of *unio mystica* has two distinct expressions; "overt" and "silent". The worship practice of Classic Pentecostalism was an example of "overt" *unio mystica*; with spirited music, handclapping, and overt expressions (sobbing, screaming, howling, and falling to the floor). One ideal example was the classic case of Toronto Blessing (see Kavan, 2004). However, there was another expression of *unio mystica*, which was the "silent" one. It can be found mostly among Eastern traditions, such as Zen. Doni's and Nita's expression

of *unio mystica* were mostly the “silent” ones. They did speak in tongues, but they rarely expressed any behavior more overt or more dramatic than speaking in tongues (such as screaming or rolling on the floor, or imitating animals’ voice).

Another important finding was that Doni and Nita both experienced God as a compassionate figure who provided security, warmth, and affection. During one apparition, God called Doni “My son”. This made Doni sobbed with joy. Doni often experienced this experience—a sensation of intense elation. This experience has been identified as *ecstasy*, which often accompanied the experience of *unio mystica* (unification of human and the Divine) (see Björkqvist, 1981). Lee Kirkpatrick (see Pargament, 2007: 355-356), a psychologist, extrapolated Bowlby’s theory of parent-child attachment to God-human attachment. Kirkpatrick argued that individual relationship toward God has very similar pattern to parent-child attachment. Secure attachment with the Divine may compensate the lack of secure attachment with the parents (Pargament, 2007). This apparently occurred in both Doni’s and Nita’s case.

The author observed that *music* was an important factor in initiating, maintaining, and ending the “speaking in tongues” session during New Judah’s worship practices. During speaking in tongues session, the volume of the *glossolalia* tended to increase as the volume of the music (voice of strings played from a portable keyboard) increases. Respectively, the volume of the *glossolalia* went into *diminuendo* as the music fades away. This finding is supplemented by Basso’s (2006) and Pilch’s (2004) research of the effect of music to trance. The researchers have found that in many trances, music was used to initiate, maintain, and end trance states (Basso, 2006; Pilch, 2004).

Curative possession. The author was unable to find participants from the curative possession category. Literature review suggests that curative possession is a universal phenomenon. It is found in America (Taves, 2006), Brasilia (Hayes, 2006), India (Basso, 2006), Ternate (Bubandt, 2009), Venezuela (Ferrándiz, 2004), Uganda (Van Duijl et. al., 2005), Java (Sobary, 1997; Koentjoroningrat, 1985), Puerto Rico (Koss-Chionino, 2003); and Tonga (McGrath, 2003). The characteristic is similar: an individual, usually a medium, is possessed by spirits. During possession trance, the mediums may perform ritual healing, give advices, or give prophecies. It has been suggested that the psychological and physiological basis underlying such phenomenon were similar mechanisms (see Carr, 1985: 220).

Entertainment possession

Jathilan is not the only form of folk entertainment that accomodates possession trance. Other forms of folk art, such as *klèdèk* and *gendruwon* (Geertz, 1960: 296), exhibit such phenomenon. In Israel, female Tunisian immigrants often practiced *Stambali*, a Tunisian folk dance to ward off evil spirits (Somer & Saadon, 2000).

Entertainment possession may serve social purposes. Through entertainment possession, disappointment, anger, and critique otherwise limited by social norms can be expressed, due to the attribution that the primary cause of the act was an external being—spirit, ghost, angel, genie (see cases described in Hoare, 2004; Somer & Saadon, 2000; Stange, 1979). However, the author did not find forms of social critique within Pak Naryo’s case.

To sum the details of the cross-case comparison, the author presents the table, as follows (table 2).

Discussion

For Ita, Anton, Doni, Nita, and Pak Naryo, the cause of “possession” was clear: it was an act done by either “bad” or “good spirits”: genie, spirits of the dead, *dhemit*, *lelembut*, or—on the “holier” side—the Holy Spirit. The five participants reveal not even any slightest doubt about the existence and interference of such beings. During possession, the participants served as channels, mediums, or victims. Being possessed have implication that any acts they performed during possession trance were done out of their control; their acts were influenced by the spiritual agents who possessed them. Hence, possession state allowed the participants to “blow out steam”; to express their deepest needs or buried negative emotions without the constraint of social norms. Sometimes, possession state allowed them to gain respect, awe, attention, and affection from other people, such as in Ita’s, Anton’s, and Pak

Naryo’s cases. In Doni’s and Nita’s cases, possession by the Holy Spirit gave them psychological security that God will do the impossible for them; that God will “part the Red Sea”. Within the five participants’ worlds that were filled by crisis, identity seeking, separation or alienation from their closest families, and desperate needs for respect and statuses, supernatural dimension and spirit possession provided relief and answers for unbearable difficulties, unexpressed needs, and unanswered prayers.

The participants’ intact self-awareness and reality testing enabled them to appraise their circumstances. Ita and Anton felt terribly embarrassed because of their possessed state; this appraisal made their possessions pathological. On the contrary, Doni and Nita did not perceive any threat or danger from their possession experience. For these two participants, “possessed by the Holy Spirit” was a beneficial experience—it gave them security, calm,

Table 2
Cross-case comparison

	Patological possession (Ita & Anton)	Religious possession (Doni & Nita)	Entertainment possession (Pak Naryo)
Symptoms	Vomiting, dizziness, pain (somatoform), “masuk angin” (as having common cold), loss of consciousness	Feeling ecstasy, serenity, calm, speaking in tongues (<i>bahasa Roh</i>)	Increasing pain tolerance, loss of consciousness, dancing according to rhythm
Possessing agent	Genie (<i>djinn</i>)	Holy Spirit	<i>Dhemit</i> (spirits)
Participant’s description of the “rasa” (sensation) during possession	excruciating pain of all” (<i>paling menyakitkan</i>), “the struggle of life and death” (<i>pertarungan hidup dan mati</i>), “the greatest tribulation” (<i>ujian terbesar</i>), “the most excruciating” (<i>sakitnya minta ampun</i>)	submerging, swimming in the river of the Holy Spirit” (<i>menyelam, berenang di sungai Roh Kudus</i>), “drinking from the water of the Holy Spirit” (<i>minum air Roh Kudus</i>), “refreshed” (<i>disegarkan</i>)	<i>Mabuk</i> (getting drunk)
End of possession episode	After receiving support & acceptance from significant others	End of music, suggestion from the worship leader	Ritual (drinking supposedly magical water & being “puffed”/ <i>ditiup</i> by the witch-doctor)

and peace. In Pak Naryo's case, the situation was more complex. For him, *ndadhi* was an ego-syntonic experience and was highly desirable. However, when *ndadhi* became out of control—when Pak Naryo began entering *ndadhi* state involuntarily, outside *jathilan*—then *ndadhi* becomes pathologic. In fact, Pak Naryo felt “*isin*” (embarrassed) when he went *ndadhi* outside *jathilan* shows. Therefore, the criterion of abnormality for possession state depend on at least two interrelating factors, namely the social acceptance and the possessed person's own appraisal.

The stress-diathesis model (Rice, 1999: 19) can be applied to analyze cases of spirit possession. This model stated that predisposing, precipitating, and perpetuating factors can be found in many psychological symptoms. Predisposing factors are latent in nature but may manifest into overt symptoms when influenced or triggered by certain conditions. Precipitating factors are events or conditions that trigger, initiate, or induce the symptoms. Perpetuating factors are circumstances that contribute to the duration (or longevity) of the symptoms. The predisposing factors identified in the participants' cases were separation with primary caregivers (parents) during childhood, lack of intimacy with family members, cultural worldview that includes supernatural world (genie, angel, Holy Spirit), and chronic stressors or crises. In Ita's case, the precipitating factor was reading a journal, which retriggered an episode of depression. In Doni's and Nita's case, the precipitating factors were the practice of “the Baptism of the Holy Spirit” combined with music and suggestions from the worship leader. In Pak Naryo's case, the precipitating factor was the ritual of summoning the *dhemits*. The perpetuating factors were somewhat more complex. In Ita's case, there were

few, if any, perpetuating factors. In fact, she experienced intermittent possession only for three days. She recovered dramatically after she met “Mbak Nuki”, “Pak Dosen”, and “Lis” who gained her trust and made her feel secure. Anton was not as fortunate as Ita. He experienced possessions within eight months period, and every day he struggled with embarrassment and anxiety that he might suffer from “severe mental disorder”. In Anton's case, the perpetuating factors were the attitude of the villagers who gave improper awe or respect to the “genie” which supposedly possessed Anton. Besides, Anton's difficulty to self-disclose made his life's burdens remain unexpressed. These perpetuating factors might have prolonged Anton's possession experience into an eight-month episode. However, Anton experienced rapid recovery when he met a healer who did not contradict his view about the supernatural world, yet at the same time gave practical tasks, such as doing sport, listening to music, seeking new friends. When Anton did meet such new friends (such as the girl he was dating with), his recovery was dramatic. Both Anton's and Ita's case showed the importance of social support toward the possessed persons' recovery. In Doni's and Nita's case, the perpetuating factor was the reward the obtained from the possession experience. Possession of the Holy Spirit and its manifestations (such as gaining the ability to speak in tongues and experiencing apparitions) provided them the calm, soothing sensation of the *unio mystica*. In some instances, both participants even experienced ecstasy (intense elation). Furthermore, the New Judah community, where Doni and Nita joined as members, revered the practice. These perpetuating factors allow Doni and Nita to experience possession by the Holy Spirit in the future. In Pak Naryo's case, the perpetuating fac-

tor was the villagers' attitude toward *ndadhi*. The villagers accepted *ndadhi* as a normal, and even entertaining, phenomenon. In addition, Pak Naryo's need of respect and awe caused him to retain his belief of "Raden Mas" Subroto, Juminah, and "Simbah" Joyo. These three *dhemits* have helped him to become a respected jathilan dancer and a public figure that has magical powers (*kasekten*).

Overall, findings showed that spirit possession was indeed a multidimensional phenomenon. Possession should not be viewed "only as" hysteria, "only as" dissociation, "only as" conversion hysteria, "only as" the "switch from beta to alpha brainwave". Those single-perspective arguments offered little to understand spirit possession. Moreover, the use of single perspective may lead to "medical materialism"; a reductionist tendency to explain human behaviors to single causality, especially biological factor (see James, 1902/2004: 70). Of course, possession experience *does* relate with human physiology. Ita and Anton, who both experienced pathological possession, reported physical symptoms such as loss of energy, sweating profusely, vomiting, and "*masuk angin*" (literally means "penetrated by air", with symptoms similar to common cold). Similar symptoms have been documented by Ng (2000), Mattoo et. al. (2002), Bartholomew & Sirois (2000), and Ferracuti et. al. (1996). Participants who experienced nonpathological possession also reported physical sensations. Doni and Nita, who experienced religious possession, reported sensations of calm, soothing, "like flowing water". Pak Naryo, who experienced entertainment possession, reported his body as "*mabuk*"—getting drunk; almost weightless. Possession experience *does* relate to physiological factors; especially the changes in the brain's biochemistry. Some

studies (e.g. Ahlberg, 1981; Björkqvist, 1981) have confirmed the changing of brainwaves during episodes of religious trance. However, those physiological processes do not imply single, or absolute, causality to the experience of possession.

There are also possibilities that *some* cases of possession may include factors that are not yet understood by present-day science. Jaime Bulatao, a Filipino investigator of the spirit possession phenomenon, reported a case of possession in which a twelve-years-old main was possessed by "engkanto" (bad spirits). During possession trance, stones were being thrown with great force, sand thrown on food, dead mouse thrown into a pail, rice was seen scooped from a dish as if done by an unseen hand (see Bulatao, 1982: 424). In fact, the researcher himself wrote that "these phenomena present a challenge to human understanding" (Bulatao, 1982: 424). Furthermore the researcher proposed that spirit possession and poltergeist are "one and the same reality with different expressions" (Bulatao, 1986: 96). The researcher (Bulatao, 1982, 1986) argued that one's mind (internal reality) may be manifested physically (externally), such as when a person can lift his hand (an external reality) by thinking of it (internal reality). Using the same principle, one's mind can be manifested externally through *telekinesis*—the throwing of stones, perfume bottles, rice, dead mouse's carcass. Bulatao (1982, 1986) argued that during trance, individual has ability—albeit an unconscious one—to perform telekinesis. Of course, these arguments need further verification. However, Bulatao's studies pointed to some possibilities that *some* "possession" cases may involve psychological and physiological mechanisms unknown to present-day science.

As a closing yet important note, data showed that belief to God—or to the supreme characteristic of a Divine Being—might be highly therapeutic. This finding was found in Ita's, Doni's, and Nita's narratives. Ita recovered dramatically after she was advised by person she trusted that "if God does not allow it, then you will not be possessed". Doni and Nita were convinced that they were loved by "the Ever-Loving, Almighty God". In Ita's, Doni's, and Nita's case, God became an answer to quell any internal conflicts. In Ita's case, when she was convinced that the Almighty God never allowed genie to harm her, then she will never be possessed. This belief was so strong that she was freed from the "genie". Similarly, in Doni's and Nita's case, they believed that God loves them so much. Their reasoning were as follows: If such Almighty God loves them, then they do not need to worry about their future. Faith to God acted as a cognitive restructuring strategy during periods of crisis experienced by the participants.

Conclusion

Mental health science has long mapped criterion of psychological disorders and disturbances, and according to those criterion, an individual who claimed that he was "possessed by spirit" and "listening to voices" can be categorized into a clinical case that fits the diagnostic criteria. However, Doni, Nita, and Pak Naryo are individuals who experienced spirit possession while at the same time did not experience disturbance of their normal functioning. Therefore, criterion of abnormality cannot be ascertained only using "list" found within manuals such as DSM-IV. The individual's and the society's cultural worldview and religious practices need to be taken into account.

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