

REVEALING THE TRUTH OF CONFLICT AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL HEAL OF THE ACEH CONFLICT SURVIVORS

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KeyWords

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the process of revealing the truth in relation to the psychological healing of survivors of the Aceh conflict. Psychological healing helps the welfare of conflict survivors and supports the implementation of reconciliation. This study used a qualitative-exploratory method with 80 subjects consisting of Aceh conflicts survivors who had and had not been taken statements from by using purposive sampling techniques. The data collection process in this study was carried out by the focus group discussion method. Conflict survivors need an opportunity to share experiences and feelings regarding the conflict. The results indicated that the process of revealing the truth can be a psychological healing tool in the form of social catharsis, providing psychological support, and as a means to realize the hope of justice for survivors.

Introduction

Conflicts and violations of human rights that occurred in Aceh in the long term have a psychological impact for the survivors of conflict (Picker, 2005). Various types of violence have left a deep mark for the survivors of conflict. The Aceh conflict ended peacefully on August 15, 2005 through a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Helsinki. The Helsinki MoU provides new hope for reconciliation as an effort to repair all sectors of people's lives that were damaged by conflict (Farid & Simarmata, 2004). Not only that, one of the mandates of the peace agreement from MoU of Helsinki also contained efforts to realize transitional justice for conflict survivors. The steps taken to realize transitional justice are through the process of revealing the truth to survivors so that the truth behind the events during the conflict can be known. The process of revealing the truth is an effort to gather information related to experiences of conflict and human rights violence until becoming a chronology of events to find out the truth related to the conflict (Leebaw, 2003).

One of the forms of revealing process of the truth is statement taking. The statement was taken by the way that committees visited the residence of survivors and interviewed each survivor related to the incident during the conflict experienced by them. Besides, the process of revealing the truth was conducted through a Testimony-Hearing Meeting where survivors were then asked to convey the chronology of the events of conflict and human rights violations that had ever been experienced during the Aceh conflict with guarantees of privacy and security.

Minow (1998) stated that the process of revealing the truth is one of the psychological healing media for survivors. Not only that, the process of revealing the truth is the initial step that must be taken to achieve conflict resolution that becomes a reliable healing tool and can be responded positively by survivors (Woodside, Barbara, & Benner, 1999). In this case, it is important for survivors to make peace with past experiences related to conflict so that survivors can have a future which is free from emotional and social trauma, and the cycle of violent conflict can be broken (White & Marsella, 2007). Therefore, psychological healing is one of the most appropriate methods of preventing prolonged conflict (White & Marsella, 2007).

Disclosure of the truth is a medium for memory preservation related to past conflict experiences (Tepperman, 2002). In addition, truth-telling also acts as a psychological healing for survivors through social catharsis, namely the activity of conveying events and conveying emotional situations related to conflict so that the emotional burden borne by survivors can be conveyed (Pupavac, 2004).

A research regarding the process of revealing the truth of conflicts is important to study because disclosure of the truth is new in Indonesia. Even the process of revealing the truth of the Aceh conflict is a pilot project as well as an initial step for the realization of transitional justice for survivors of conflict and human rights violations. Therefore, the researcher explored the process of revealing the truth of the Aceh conflict as a form of expansion of studies related to Aceh conflict. So far, the study of the Aceh conflict is more often about the psychological impact, but researchs related to the psychological healing of survivors of the Aceh conflict have not yet been conducted.

The process of revealing the truth carried out in Aceh is not only an attempt to heal psychologically, but also it paves the way to reconciliation (Hamber, 2001). Reconciliation literally clarifies the facts related to various human rights violations and abuse experienced by survivors and these activities are considered to be able to make the situation of conflict survivors worse (Havig, 2019). However, through honest confrontation from survivors, reconciliation can manifest real psychological healing (Havig, 2019). Based on the phenomena mentioned, the researcher wants to find out how the process of truth-telling has an impact on the psychological healing of conflict survivors.

Methodology

The selection of research subjects was performed by purposive sampling, which is a sampling technique based on certain considerations that are assessed in accordance with the objectives or research problems in a population (Idrus, 2009). The criteria of sample in this study are conflict survivors, both those who have or have not carried out the process of disclosing the truth. Conflict survivors are individuals who experienced physical, mental, social, and economic impacts from the implementation of the process of truth telling (Pupavac, 2004; Picker, 2005). Respondents in this study were conflict survivors who had and had not taken a statement by the TRC. The survivors whose statements had been taken were those who had been asked for statements related to the experience of conflict by the statement-taking committee. Whereas survivors whose statements had not been taken were those who had not yet been asked for statements related to conflict experiences. The total number of respondents was 80 Acehnese conflict survivors from two different regencies, namely Pidie and Aceh Besar districts.

This study used a qualitative approach with research type of exploratory. Explorative research aims to describe a new phenomenon, in this study, namely psychological healing for survivors of the Aceh conflict through the process of revealing the truth. Explorative research is not intended to test certain hypotheses, but it only illustrates the existence of symptoms or circumstances of a phenomenon (Arikunto, 2010).

Data collection in this study was through focus group discussion method. Focus group discussions were conducted to collect qualitative data on the attitudes and views of conflict survivors towards the process of revealing the truth as a psychological cure. This research began with the pre-field stage. Then it continues with the field research stage for conducting data collection. In the pre-

field stage, the researcher identified research respondents, compiled a research guide in the form of a focus group discussion, and then conducted an expert review of the research guide. At the field stage, researchers conducted focus group discussions on survivors of the Aceh conflict.

The data were analyzed by using an interactive model that referred to Miles and Huberman's theory (Herdiansyah, 2015). The process of data analysis began with the merging and uniformity of data into writing (script). Then the data display was performed, namely making coding and the theme. Then, they were grouped based on the similarity of coding. Conclusions were drawn, and verification was obtained from themes which are the results of research.

To guarantee the credibility and confirmability of the research, triangulation of data was carried out. It aimed at crosschecking the data and doing interpretation. Data triangulation was done by exploring the truth of information through various methods and sources of data acquisition. In addition to conducting focus group discussions, observations, documentation and archives, the researcher confirmed data with Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Aceh. Its purpose is to provide insights that result in the breadth of knowledge of the phenomenon that was studied. According to Seale (2003) triangulation aims to test research material as analytical material to increase research coherence.

Findings

Based on the results of focus group discussions, five themes or classifications were obtained. They are the process of revealing the truth can restore past memories, the process of revealing the truth is as a psychological cathartic media, the process of revealing the truth provides psychological support for survivors, the process of revealing the truth becomes a means for survivors to realize their hopes for justice, and physical reactions after the process of revealing the truth. The results of the study are summarized into five themes as follows:

The Process of Revealing the Truth Restores the Past Memory

One of the forms of the truth-telling process is statement taking. During the process, survivors were asked to describe the events of the conflict period they experienced, such as loss of family, loss of property, torture, and suffering experienced during the conflict. This made the survivors felt sad and tense because they were carried away during the conflict. Remembering the conflict incident made the survivor cry during the statement taking process. Survivors sometimes did not know how to recount the events of the conflict they experienced. Survivors also mentioned that they were not able to tell about conflict experiences. In addition, they preferred that conflict experiences should not be reminded again. It is because if they are not asked about conflicts, they will not be too reminded of the conflict events and focus on their daily activities. Conversely, if asked about past conflict experiences, survivors will be reminded of past sadness.

"We who have experienced. Among us some had died, some had burned houses, some were persecuted, and some lost property" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/62 Years Old).

"If we are like that, it's because if we discuss the problem, everyone will be sad" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/54 Years Old).

"Sad to tell, we do not want to tell again, it will tear us again, we prefer to not tell again" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/70 Years Old).

"Those who were killed, those who were severely burned at home, were specifically victims of the conflict" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/65 Years Old).

"How to tell, here is severe, it is because the GAM (The Free Aceh Movement Organization) base was in Indrapuri, GAM commander was here, all run here, were sought here. If not, the villagers could be victims, women were snapped" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/55 Years Old).

"I personally feel a little tense, because we are carried away during the conflict, when we tell what we felt during the conflict, the problem of persecution, of course we are carried away, so rather tense" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/64 Years Old).

"There were many victims. Hence, if we remember the past, we must be sad. There were our husband, child, and family who had died as the victims." (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/70 Years Old).

"The things are recalled. It is all that have been forgotten, yeah it is like a former. If you look at it again, you will remember it, except if it's lost marks, but it's not that" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/58 Years Old).

The Process of Revealing the Truth as Psychological Catharsis Media

Because they equally experienced the conflict, it made the survivors sometimes do not tell each other or share their respective past grief. This made the process of disclosing the truth through statement taking allowed survivors to express feelings related to the experience of the conflict to others, in this case to the officer that took the statement. By telling stories, survivors felt more relieved

because the burden of feelings that have been buried since the conflict seemed to have been released along with storytelling in the statement-taking process.

"We feel relieved" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/70 Years Old).

"We feel relieved, free" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/58 Years Old).

"It's already been released, it feels good" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/65 Years Old).

The Process of Revealing the Truth Provides Psychological Support to Survivors

Survivors were happy with the process of revealing the truth because there are still parties who care for the survivors. Survivors also thanked those who carried out the truth-telling process, namely the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Aceh. This is because even though the conflict has long since passed, there are still parties who care and pay attention to Aceh conflict survivors.

"We are happy, because there are still parties that care about us, there is a hope in the future because we are asked questions" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/58 Years Old).

"We are happy, there is party that cares about us, it means there are people who still remember us. We feel cared for." (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/65 Years Old).

"We know that the purpose is good, to help our village society, to know what are the complaints of villagers after the conflict. The purpose of the TRC was good, we were happy if someone asked questions, so that we could reveal what had happened to us" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/60 Years Old).

The Process of Revealing the Truth Becomes a Means for Survivors to Realize Hope for Justice

Through the process of revealing the truth, survivors will be asked to tell the actual events experienced, including the forms of suffering and losses experienced. Thus, the process of revealing the truth is considered as a means to convey aspirations to be given justice for the suffering and loss caused by conflict. The community also knew that the process of revealing the truth did not provide financial assistance for survivors, but the survivors had a hope for the process of revealing the truth because it is considered to be able to bring the voices of survivors of the Aceh conflict. This is also the reason why the survivors were willing to reveal the conflict incident that they experienced even though they had to remember the sadness and suffering of the past.

"We don't know yet if there is help or what. If it's true, we are very thankful." (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/65 Years Old).

"Our hope is that what the TRC has said is true. The aim is so that our hidden hopes can be realized by them" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/54 Years Old).

"Many people list or investigate victims of conflict, but they don't. If the TRC, we doesn't know it either, it depends on God" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/70 Years Old).

"The TRC was the organization that wanted to lead us and bring the voice of us victims of conflict" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/58 Years Old).

"Our hope is that if someone is sick, at least there is a cost for treatment, that's the hope of our villagers" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/62 Years Old).

"It is for a good purpose, namely so that the community can express what is experienced, but we hope that in the future it will be processed, we are given capital or a little help to live" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/58 Years Old).

Physical Reaction After the Process of Revealing the Truth

When they were asked for information related to past conflicts, the survivors were sad and sometimes cried. However, survivors who became research respondents did not experience further physical reactions after statement taking. Survivors mentioned that they were only sad during the process of taking statements and did not drag on in grief.

"In the night we didn't know what else to do, just remembering that it was a dream in the early days of the conflict, now it's not" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/58 Years Old).

"I remember, but not dream, won't be sad for days, but only cried when we are asked" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/62 Years Old).

"The wound has healed, but the mark is still there. So, I still remember. If I remember the past, I will cry and remember the pain" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/65 Years Old).

"It's pounding and imagined. It's the same as scraping an existing wound" (Focus Group Discussion, April 21st, 2019, Society/64 Years Old).

Discussion

Survivors who had been taken statements also experienced psychosocial effects, where survivors of conflict had positive emotional reactions that were shown in the form of feelings of pleasure and relief after giving statements. Survivors felt that there were still parties who care about the experience of conflict they experienced. This is in accordance with research conducted by Pupavac (2004) which states that the process of revealing the truth can be a means of social catharsis, where with the existence of truth-telling activities, survivors can forgive any events that occur through the delivery of past experience related to violence that has been experienced.

Another psychosocial impact of the process of revealing the truth is as a psychological healing tool that occurs through the discovery of facts related to human rights violence that have not been revealed before, this also mediates the survivors to feel relieved, because after recounting their past experiences related to conflict, then survivors will emerge the possibility of revealing the truth that has not been realized (Minow, 1998). In this regard, the process of revealing the truth which in its implementation is closely related to remembering and recounting past experiences plays an important role in the recovery of trauma and the formation of historical memory (Barsalou, 2005).

This process of revealing the truth can also have a positive impact on the psychological health of respondents (Minow, 1998). Respondents can also build good interpersonal relationships with other communities and be able to realize the existence of social support that comes from the scope of the community itself, where social support is very instrumental in the recovery of psychological problems and increasing the capacity of the community to be more empowered in carrying out the role as social beings as part of the community (Touze, Silove, & Zwi, 2005).

Conflict survivors hoped that the process of disclosing the truth becomes a means to fight for the rights and justice of conflict survivors, and to be a preventive measure so that past conflicts do not recur, and promises guarantees of non-repetition of human rights violations. Thus, survivors can improve the pattern of community life by building healthy collective relations between people both with conflict survivors or not (Leebaw, 2003).

The implementation of the process of revealing the truth is also related to psychological rehabilitation which can affect survivors in social life. Likewise, conflict survivors who previously experienced conflict and long-term violence will develop destructive social patterns that require fundamental psychological intervention to realize reconstruction and reconciliation in social life patterns (Barsalou, 2005).

Survivors who have never participated in the process of revealing the truth experienced a psychosocial impact related to the experience of human rights violence experienced during the conflict, but not the impact on the process of truth telling. The desire of conflict survivors to fight for these rights is also driven by the desire to meet the need for security. Maslow through his hierarchy of needs explains that everyone has the motivation to fulfill a hierarchy of needs (Feist & Feist, 2010). With regard to conflicts and human rights violations experienced, through the process of revealing the truth survivors also expects that the needs for security can be met. By meeting the needs for security, it can bridge the conflict survivors to be able to realize other needs, namely the need to be loved, the need to be respected, and finally achieve self-actualization (Feist & Feist, 2010).

Psychological healing efforts for conflict survivors can be done by providing opportunities for survivors to be heard in detail related to traumatic events. Not limited to that, the process of revealing the truth also becomes a process of social improvement, which is able to realize formal justice, individual and collective healing, and form the structure of preventing human rights violations in the future. If the process of revealing the truth is successfully implemented, it can encourage total psychological healing for survivors (Hamber, 2001).

The process of revealing the truth is a long process. However, its implementation can support psychological healing efforts so it can realize the reconciliation for conflict survivors. Survivors can also increase psychological resilience so that human rights violations that have been experienced in the past can be forgiven and reduce the possibility of repetition of human rights violations in the future. Then, peace and harmony in social life after conflict can be realized (Davis, Nsengiyumva, & Hyslop, 2019).

Truth-telling is a simple act that has a major impact on the psychological healing of survivors. Recognition given by survivors of the traumatic events they experienced helped to broadly promote the events of the conflict experienced to the wider community. This affects the social life and welfare of the community after the conflict so it is important to consider (Weston, 2018).

Conflict survivors need not only to get recognition and compensation both in moral and material terms for all treatments that are contrary to human rights during the conflict, but also survivors have the right to recover psychologically. The psychological recovery is when survivors are able to forgive and reconcile with all incidents of conflict in the past. If this is realized, the survivors will achieve complete reconciliation and psychological well-being (Thsuma, 2018).

Conclusion

Based on research that has been done, it can be concluded that the process of revealing the truth can be a psychological healing tool, as a psychological cathartic media, provide psychological support for survivors, and be a means for survivors to realize their

hopes for justice. Therefore, there is a need for more attention from policy makers to realize the formation of psychological interventions that aim to maximize psychosocial recovery and minimize the negative impact of the process of disclosure of the truth overall for survivors in various regencies in Aceh.

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