

**KIAI TAWAKKAL AS ŽIŽEKIAN SUBJECT:
READING MUSTOFA BISRI'S GUS JAKFAR IN SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK'S
PERSPECTIVE**

Aliyatul Himmah

Universitas Gadjah Mada

aliyatulhimmahms@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper examines the spiritual practice of Kiai Tawakkal in Gus Mus' *Gus Jakfar* by implementing Slavoj Žižek's theory of subject. The articles which combine these two scientific dimensions need to be done because there are no similar studies which have been previously conducted. In addition, by using Žižek's theory, it is expected that readers will be able to understand Sufism from a "rational" perspective. The results of this study indicate that *suluk* carried out by Kiai Tawakkal explicitly breaks the symbolic boundaries adopted by Gus Jakfar and the surrounding community. This act becomes a means for Kiai Tawakkal to reach the Real, or the Haq.

Keywords: Kiai Tawakkal; Real; Sufism; Symbolic

INTRODUCTION

Addressing Sufism themes among lay audiences is not an easy matter. This certainly requires a special method to make the teaching of Sufism be easily accepted. Many authors have raised Sufism themes in their literary works, including Ahmad Mustofa Bisri, or who is familiarly called Gus Mus. By using light and straightforward language, Gus Mus tried to present "*da'wah*" (preaching) in the midst of society through his writings. Among several of his works, *Gus Jakfar* is one of his phenomenal short stories. *Gus Jakfar* is Gus Mus' first short story becoming a selected short story of Kompas 2004. This short story is included in the anthology of short story entitled "*Lukisan Kaligrafi*" which was awarded by the Southeast Asian Literature Assembly (*Majelis Sastra Asia Tenggara/ Mastera*) in 2005. Being a writer and *kiai* (cleric) highly influences his selection on themes of spirituality and religiosity.

This short story tells the story of Gus Jakfar who is the youngest son of Kiai Saleh, elder caretaker of the Sabilul Muttaqin Islamic boarding school. What mostly attracts the public's attention is the unique abilities he owns which is reading someone's signs. One time, he dreamed of meeting his father. The father sent him to meet Kiai Tawakkal. Gus Jakfar then roamed around to look for Kiai Tawakkal. During his meeting, Gus Jakfar felt

hesitant and awkward, because on the forehead of Mbah Jogo a.k.a Kiai Tawakkal, who was so pious, it was written the sign of “*ahli neraka*” (inhabitant of the hell). Clandestinely on one night Gus Jakfar followed Kiai Tawakkal who turned out to be going to a café supposed to be a place of prostitution. Kiai Tawakkal knew about Gus Jakfar's whereabouts and invited him. Kiai Tawakkal said to Gus Jakfar not to worry about the sign he saw on the forehead of Kiai Tawakkal. Gus Jakfar was shocked because Kiai Tawakkal knew what had haunted his mind. After the conversation, they agreed to return. Kiai Tawakkal walked across the river while Gus Jakfar swam. After arriving at the edge, he realized that Kiai Tawakkal had disappeared. Since then, Gus Jakfar was then reluctant to read the signs again.

Apart from what is explained above, there are a lot of Kiai Tawakkal's behaviors that seem logically unacceptable. The way to communicate with God is beyond the reach of ordinary people. This can be explained within the realm of Sufism. Sufism itself can be understood as a spiritual way for a servant to get closer to the *Haq*. Talking about Sufism cannot be separated from the three stages that must be taken by a servant to go to God the *Haq*, namely *Sharia*, *Tariqa*, and *Haqiqa*.

Sharia comes from the word *syara* which means explanation. While terminologically, *Sharia* is everything that becomes the command and prohibition of Allah. *Tariqa* is a distinctive journey taken by *salik* to Allah (Al-Jurjani, n.d: 119). *Salik* is a term that is attached to someone who practices *tariqa*. While *haqiqa*, said Al-Jurjani in *Mu'jam at-Ta'rifat*, calls it *Haq al-Yaqin*, the mortal and at the same time eternal state of a servant in the *Haq*. It is called *Haq al-Yaqin* because the servant had reached the level of *musyahada* (witnessing the *Haq*) and felt death in his life (Al-Jurjani, n.d.: 80).

Discussing the stages of a servant in Sufism practice to reach the *Haq* seems relatable to the discussion of Žižek regarding the subject's actions. The subject, according to Žižek, is always divided, therefore, he keeps moving to meet the shortcomings in himself and keep doing the process to become the subject (Žižek, 1999: 76). To explain the condition of the subject, Žižek borrows and reconstructs Lacan's trinity of the symbolic, imaginary, and real. The symbolic can be understood as a reality that is spelled out. The imaginary includes things that fail to be translated into language. Whereas the real is the arena that has not been spelled out, which is emptied of symbolic identification (Žižek, 2008: 182).

In relation to the stages in Sufism, *salik* as the subject of “lack” continues to strive to make himself whole, by joining himself with the *Haq* or what Žižek called as the real. In this level, *salik* has reached the level of *haqiqa*. On the other hand, carrying out religious rites, such as prayer and fasting, is included into *sharia* or symbolic domain.

Unfortunately, the discussion on Sufism in the perspective of Žižek's theory on subject is still minimally conducted. By focusing on the character of Kiai Tawakkal in *Gus Jakfar*, this article tries to analyze Sufism stages of Kiai Tawakkal and see its relevance to Slavoj Žižek's theory of subjectivity through his triadic concept of symbolic, imaginary, and real.

Theoretical Framework

Žižek theory is largely inspired by Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. The subject according to Žižek is always divided. Furthermore, he said that "power always interpolates us and calls us as separated subjects" (Žižek, 2005: 286). Like what Lacan said, this deficiency fosters a constant desire and effort to cover up the shortcomings, rediscover what is lost, make the human being complete, perfect, find his identity to become himself again (Faruk, 2012: 186).

The imaginary phase is a realm before the ego understands language. The problem in this phase is self-identification. In the phase called the mirror phase, the ego is split between itself and the image of itself before it is fully integrated in the structure of language. Self-identity is constructed by something external (self-image) (Lacan, 26: 78). Thus, alienation is constitutive of the imaginary order. Alienation is the imaginary itself.

The process of becoming a subject is in the symbolic order, when self negotiates with language (a chain of markers) so that its imaginary identification is subdued by symbolic identification (Setiawan, 2016: 11). In the symbolic realm, the subject is always constituted by negativity called 'lack' (*manque*). In the sign system, each signifier must be related to signified. Therefore, each signifier is always a sign of shortcomings, and congruently with it. Desire is always a lack of satisfaction. Therefore, there is a "lack of insatiable in markers" (Lacan, 2004: 155). The object which is desired by this subject cannot be fully embraced because it is not symbolized and cannot be represented through language.

The absence of the object causes anxiety, that is the anxious state without objects. By the presence of anxiety, there is actually something deeper than the symbolic realm - something that is the real source of the non-symbiotic object. This is what Lacan calls the real.

The real is the foundation of the imaginary and the symbolic but at the same time it cannot be recognized. Hence, every effort to identify the symbolic will always fail to reach the full meaning because there is always something left and unperceived. The real, therefore, marks the boundaries of symbolic identification. The real is in one domain where the subject (internal) and the object (external) become indistinguishable. The real is a void in the existing symbolic order. Humans in their lives can be swept away in symbolic order routines. However, he ultimately had to answer the call from the real himself. It can also be affirmed that humans, in essence, are the real themselves, because they always escape the grip of conceptual definitions and symbolization (Wattimena, 2011: 77)

In the efforts to achieve the real, there is a kind of death drive felt by the subject (Žižek, 1999: 49-50). Suicide, in this sense, is not interpreted literally, but symbolically, that is an attempt to withdraw from symbolic coordinates and cancel all inherited symbolic laws in the subject. Death drive cannot be tamed, either by manifest dreams or fantasies (Setiawan, 2016: 102).

Furthermore, the second authentic action which the subject will take is criminal. That is to do actions that go beyond the symbolic laws that bind the subject. This action is an event of encounter with truth that is outside the symbolic order. The requirement for

carrying out this action is more than just being faithful to the truth, that is by actively “spitting out the truth” (Robet, 2010: 127).

This radical action is not intended to create a new subject, because it means it will plunge the subject into a new Symbolic realm (Akmal, 2015: 15). This condition will lead a person to become a psychotic subject, namely someone who is able to hold himself in a state of distance from the symbolic order (Žižek, 2008: 186). The distance of the subject from the Symbolic creates a moment of emptiness.

METHOD

This study applied the method of Žižekian subject. This method departs from the theoretical assumption that the subject is always divided, therefore, he continuously attempts to move and meet the shortcomings in himself as well as continue to make the process into the subject (Žižek, 1999: 76). The data about Žižekian subject and actions were selected. All data used in the analysis which were taken from the short story entitled *Gus Jakfar* would be connected to each other and then analyzed. First, this article coherently examined the subject phases from imaginary, symbolic, to real. Then, the behavior of this subject is associated with the level of Sufism, namely sharia, tariqa, and *haqiqa*.

Kiai Tawakkal as Žižekian Subject

Narrated in the story that Kiai Tawakkal was the Kiai of the elder Kiai. His physical appearance does not describe his age as more than a hundred years. His appearance is still vigorous and his eyes always radiate wisdom. It is described that his daily activities were similar to other Kiai.

“... mengimami salat jamaah; melakukan salat-salat sunnat seperti dhuha, tahajjud, witr, dsb.; mengajar kitab-kitab (umumnya kitab-kitab besar); mujahadah; dzikir malam; menemui tamu; dan semacamnya. Kalaupun beliau keluar, biasanya untuk memenuhi undangan hajatan atau- dan ini sangat jarang sekali- mengisi pengajian umum.”

“... leading congregational prayers; performing *sunnat* prayers such as *dhuha*, *tahajjud*, *witr*, etc.; teaching Islamic books (generally major books); *mujahadah*; night *dhikr*; meeting guests; etc. Even if he goes out, usually to fulfill the invitation for celebration or - and this is very rare - to become the speaker in public recitation.”

The rituals of obligatory worship must become the routine of Kiai Tawakkal, such as prayer, *dhikr*, and *witr*. In addition to performing obligatory worship, he also performs *sunnah* services such as *tahajjud* and *dhuha* prayers. Even, he was not spared from establishing relationships with fellow humans, such as meeting guests and attending ceremonies. In the Sufism stage, the Kiai Tawakkal can be said at the stage of the sharia, proven by his actions carrying out the rituals required by Allah, such as prayer, zakat, fasting, and so on.

Žižek categorized daily rituals such performed by Kiai Tawakkal in symbolic realm, where the subject who felt himself deficient was trying to fulfill these shortcomings by looking for the object he desired. In an effort to fulfill this, Kiai Tawakkal as a subject tried to find the object by conducting a list of worship required by God. By performing these religious rituals, Kiai Tawakkal seemed to have got what he was looking for. But there is still anxiety in him, the feeling of lack. Instead of being united with his God, he was trapped in the symbol of religion. Praying, fulfilling religious teachings, and so on are ways or symbols for someone to be united to God (Setiawan, 2016: 12).

The object that Lacan calls as the real is beyond the symbolic realm. To be able to truly unite with God as an object that was addressed by Kiai Tawakkal, in Sufism there is a phase called *tariqa*, the special journey that must be taken by Kiai Jakfar as *salik* to be united to Allah.

“Memang ada kalanya beliau keluar pada malam-malam tertentu; tapi menurut santri-santri yang lama, itu pun merupakan kegiatan rutin yang sudah dijalani Kiai Tawakkal sejak muda. Semacam lelana brata, kata mereka.”

“There are times when he goes out on certain nights; but according to the senior students, it was also a routine activity that had been carried out by Kiai Tawakkal since he was young. A kind *lelana brata*, they said.”

Lelana brata comes from the Javanese language which means wandering, traveling. In relation to the practice of Sufism, this can be interpreted as a *tariqa*, namely the wandering of a *salik* to the *Haq* or the real in the perspective of Žižek. It is not clearly explained what is being done by Kiai Tawakkal in *lelana brata*. But there was a time when Gus Jakfar tried to follow Kiai Tawakkal secretly. He was shocked when he met Kiai, who resignedly greeted him at a café which according to Gus Jakfar was full of lust. Such situation as if answered his curiosity. Gus Jakfar then found out that there is a sign of “inhabitant of hell” in Kiai Tawakkal's forehead.

Kiai Tawakkal's Death Drive and Criminals

The actions of Kiai Tawakkal described earlier can be called symbolic death drive (suicide) as well as criminal actions, that is an attempt to withdraw from symbolic coordinates and then carry out actions beyond the symbolic. As a cleric, Kiai Tawakkal should visit places of worship or at least visit a quiet place from an atmosphere of immorality. However, in this case he tried to get out of the grip. He visited a café that was full of impurity. It was not explained further what Kiai had done there, but Gus Jakfar said that the Kiai was sitting back in a corner while smoking. In addition, all the people in the café seemed to have known the figure of Kiai Tawakkal.

Lelana brata which is understood as the stage of *tariqa* to open the boundary wall between *salik* and the real is done by *riyadhah* (exercises) and *mujahadah* (struggle). The

arrival of Kiai Tawakkal to the café could be a form of his efforts to conduct *riyadhah* and *mujahadah*, or commit suicide and symbolic crimes.¹

“humans are not simply alive ... [but are] possessed by the strange drive to enjoy life ... passionately attached to a surplus which sticks out and derails the ordinary run of things” (Žižek, 2006: 62).

Žižek mentions that humans have strange impulses that lead someone to hit ordinary boundaries which can lead to a pleasurable life. Here it can be understood that committing suicide and criminal acts will lead Kiai Tawakkal to ecstasy to unite himself with God.

At this point, does Kiai Tawakkal fail to merge with the real for doing things which, according to general logic (in this case represented by Gus Jakfar) are out of boundaries, such as visiting a café? It seems that Gus Jakfar's suspicion that Kiai Tawakkal really deserves the label “inhabitant of the hell” is not right.

“Anak muda, kau tidak perlu mencemaskan saya hanya karena kau melihat tanda “Ahli Neraka” di kening saya. Kau pun tidak perlu bersusah-payah mencari bukti yang menunjukkan bahwa aku memang pantas masuk neraka. Karena, pertama, apa yang kau lihat belum tentu merupakan hasil dari pandangan kalbumu yang bening. Kedua, kau kan tahu, sebagaimana neraka dan sorga, aku adalah milik Allah. Maka terserah kehendak-Nya, apakah Ia memasukkan diriku ke sorga atau neraka. Untuk memasukkan hamba-Nya ke sorga atau neraka, sebenarnya Ia tidak memerlukan alasan.”

“Young man, you don't need to worry about me just because you see the “inhabitant of hell” sign on my forehead. You don't have to bother looking for evidence to show that I really deserve to go to hell. Because, first, what you see is not necessarily the result of the clear view of your heart. Second, you know, like hell and heaven, I belong to God. Then it is up to His will, does He put me into heaven or hell. To enter His servant into heaven or hell, in fact He does not need a reason.”

The inaction of Kiai Tawakkal against heaven and hell becomes a radical act of suicide and crime, an act in which he breaks the symbolic boundary.² Generally, the person who is worshipping hopes to get a reward that leads to heaven or hell in return.

¹ To reach the level of *Haq al-Yaqin*, *salik* must be able to feel death in his life. Muhammad said: *تموتوا أن قبل موتوا* “Death to you before death comes”. This first death does not literally mean death. It is the death of all five senses and heart rate, and ultimately buried. The definition of death is the second death. Whereas, what is meant by the first death is the breaking of the bondage of lust which entangles *salik*. This first definition of death is more or less in line with the concept of death drive proposed by Žižek, for the first death cancels all the inheritance of symbolic law (*syara* law) that exists in the subject. Therefore, we often read stories about servants who are ecstatic in their God, often take actions or make statements that conflict with reason and *syara* (symbolic law). It can be seen in the words of Al-Hallaj in poetry (Ibn ‘Ajibah, *Iqazh al-Himmam fi Syarh al-Hikam*, Cairo: Dar al-Ma’arif, n.d., p.260):

أنا أنت بلا شك # سبحانه سبحاني
عصيانك و عصيانك # توحيدك توحيدك

Without any doubt, I am you # Your Most Holy, My Most Holy
Your monotheism is my monotheism # (likewise) your defiance is my defiance.

² It can even be said that to reach the level of *haqiqah*, it is common for a *salik* to perforate the Sharia. The Qur'an itself provides this revolutionary example through metaphor. In Surah al-Kahf:71, when Prophet Moses and a servant (one opinion called

It can be seen how Kiai is already in the phase of *haqiqa*. He has reached the real. For *salik* (as Kiai tawakkal) in this phase, there is no true reality except Allah. Allah is the absolute and others, including *salik*, is relative. Therefore, the existence of *salik* is very dependent on the mercy of Allah (Kartanegara, 2006: 6). It can be seen how Kiai Tawakkal surrendered himself to the will of God, whether he will go to hell or to heaven later. He had not thought about heaven or hell as his ultimate goal. Heaven and hell are symbolic because the real purpose is to unite with God. The merging of the Kiai Tawakkal with the real is giving rise to a desire called *jouissance* or pleasure.

"Ayo kita pulang!" tiba-tiba Kiai bangkit. "Sebentar lagi subuh. Setelah sembahyang subuh nanti, kau boleh pulang."

"Let's go home!" Kiai suddenly got up. "It's dawn soon. After subuh prayer, you may go home."

In this conversation, it appears that Kiai Tawakkal invited Gus Jakfar to perform *subuh* prayer. In relation to Sufism, if a *Salik* has reached *haqiqa*, he cannot leave the sharia and tariqa. Sayyid al-Bakri (1886: 8), in his book *Kifayah al-Atqiyah wa Minhaj al-Asfiyah*, said: "Sharia is like a boat that mediates us to get to the *Haq*, while tariqa is like ocean that becomes the "place" of the *Haq*, and *haqiqa* is like a pearl found in the ocean. A person will not reach the level of *haqiqa* (getting the pearl) before he reaches the ocean. And so he will not be able to navigate the ocean without an ark ". The analogy said by Sayyid al-Bakri presupposes the existence of a sequence of levels that *salik* must pass. Nevertheless, these levels are not independent, but intersect with each other and go hand in hand without negating each other. Even a *salik* must be able to run all three during his lifetime. Sayyid al-Bakri writes, "*haqiqa* without sharia is in vain, while sharia without *haqiqa* is empty". It can be concluded that in the realm of Sufism, the entrapment of Kiai Tawakkal in symbolic religious rites is a must. This does not necessarily make him return far from the real. It is precisely the requirement to do sharia, tariqa, and *haqiqa* holistically.

Kiai Tawakkal in this short story is not described as experiencing an imaginary phase, the phase in which he identifies himself. This can be caused by the narration of stories that take from the point of view of Gus Jakfar, a figure who incidentally only knows Kiai Tawakkal when Kiai is at the symbolic and real stage. In the short story, the intensity

him Prophet Khidhir) were on a sea voyage, suddenly the servant punched the ship. Narrated at the end of the spiritual journey of Prophet Moses, the servant explained that at the end of the voyage, there was a king who would seize the fishing boat.

As mentioned earlier, that Sharia is like a ship, while tariqa is the sea and *haqiqa* is pearls found on the seabed. In the perspective of Sufism, we will get that: fishermen are servants of Allah who are worshiping and doing good deeds (being fishermen and looking for fish - remember, in verse 63, the Koran also makes a metaphor about fish -). They sailed the sea of the tariqa by riding a Sharia ship. Such is the routine of their religious life until later the servant comes carrying an ax to destroy the Sharia ship, so that they sink into the sea of tariqa and meet the pearl of *haqiqa*.

The destruction of Sharia ship can mean nothing more than "pass through the (symbolic) rules that have been set by Allah", such as not performing prayers, fasting and zakat; but it can also be interpreted as "to make the fishermen aware not to be lulled by charities which are limited to mere symbols, because at any time the King (Allah, the Real) will seize their worship vehicle (turn them off)". With the destruction (awareness), the fishermen will immediately improve themselves to go to a higher level.

of communication between the two figures is very minimal. It merely happened one night when Gus Jakfar followed Kiai Tawakkal.

CONCLUSION

This article found similarities between Slavoj Žižek's theory of subject and *al-maratib at-tsalsats* (three levels) in Sufism. If Žižek's theory comprises the symbolic, imaginary and real; Sufism also embraces sharia, tariqa, and *haqiqa*. Kiai Tawakkal is a needy subject who finds an object to fulfill himself. What is desired by Kiai Tawakkal in this matter is to be united with his God. By applying Žižek theory, this article discovers Sufism phases of Kiai Tawakkal. The symbolic phase of the Kiai Tawakkal is represented by the practice of sharia, in which he performs the deeds and worship required by Allah. Because he had not found the object that becomes his desire (the *Haq* or the real), he kept trying to find it. In Sufism, this phase is called tariqa. In his journey, he had reached the peak of *haqiqa*, the state in which he had united with his God. This is characterized by ignorance of symbolic things like heaven and hell because he felt he had found what he was looking for. However, when he has reached the real, he does not necessarily leave symbolic worship such as prayer. This is in accordance with the principle of Sufism that the three stages of Sufism must still be done even though they have reached the peak of *haqiqa*. The imaginary phase of Kiai Tawakkal was not found in this short story. The absence of this description might be due to the narration from the point of view of Gus Jakfar who had just known Kiai Tawakkal.

REFERENCES

- Akmal, R. (2015). Subjektivitas Pramudya Ananta Toer dalam novel *Perburuan*: Kajian Psikoanalisis Historis Slavoj Žižek. *Jentera*, 4(1), 12-23.
- Al-Bakri, A.B. (1886). *Kifayah al-atqiya` wa minhaj al-asfiya`*. Kairo: Matba'ah al-Khairiyah.
- Al-Jurjani. (n.d). *Mu'jam at-ta'rifat*. Kairo: Dar al-Fadilah.
- Bisri, A.M. (2008). *Lukisan kaligrafi*. Jakarta: Kompas.
- Faruk. (2012). *Metode penelitian sastra: Sebuah penjelajahan awal*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar.
- Kartanegara, M. (2006). *Menyelami lubuk tasawuf*. Jakarta: Erlangga.
- Lacan, J. (2004). *Le séminaire X : L'angoisse*. Paris: Seuil.
- Robet, R. (2010). *Manusia politik: Subyek radikal dan emansipasi di era kapitalisme global menurut Slavoj Žižek*. Tangerang: Marjin Kiri.
- Žižek, S. (1999). *The ticklish subject: The absent centre of political ontology*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, S. (2005) Interrogating the Real, In R. Butler and S. Stephens (eds.). New York and London: Continuum.
- Žižek, S. (2006). *The parallax view*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Žižek, S. (2008). *The sublime object of ideology* (2nd edition). London: Verso.

- Setiawan, R. (2016). *Membaca kritik Slavoj Žižek: Sebuah penjelajahan awal kritik sastra kontemporer*. Surabaya: Negasi Kritika.
- Wattimena, R.A.A. (2011). Slavoj Žižek tentang manusia sebagai subjek dialektis. *Orientasi Baru* 20(1), 61-83

