NOBEL
Journal of Literature and Language Teaching

Volume 16, Number 1, April 2025, 74-91
DOI: https://doi.org/10.15642/NOBEL.2024.16.1.74-91

MADNESS CONCEPT IN RUSDI MATHARI'S NOVEL: A FOUCAULDIAN READING OF *MERASA PINTAR, BODOH SAJA TAK PUNYA*

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Article Info

Article History:
Received January 2025
Accepted March 2025
Published April 2025

Keywords:
Madness, Michel Foucault, Rusdi Mathari

Abstract

This study of the literary work *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari employs Michel Foucault's theory of madness to analyze narrative data and identify the concept of madness within the epistémè of the village community where the main character, Cak Dlahom, resides. The main character gets different treatment from two groups of people he meets in his daily life. The first group is people who always need confirmation from Cak Dlahom. The second group consists of people who make a priori judgments, attribute the concept of madness to Cak Dlahom, treat him as a different person, and then laugh at and ignore him. However, Cak Dlahom managed to fight the social *epistémè* by creating a narrative that broke the stigma. This research successfully identifies the patterns and impacts of societal judgment on individuals who are perceived as different. Additionally, there is an image of an individual's ability to resist the dominant view and shape their own narrative in society.

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p-ISSN 2087-0698
e-ISSN 2549-2470

INTRODUCTION

Madness has long occupied a paradoxical position in human civilization, feared and revered, stigmatized yet mystified. Far from being a mere clinical or psychological condition, madness frequently operates as a mirror reflecting the dominant cultural, moral, and political norms of a given society. Its meaning is never static; it is shaped, negotiated, and redefined through shifting power relations and social discourses. Within literary traditions, madness emerges as a potent metaphor, one that interrogates the boundaries of reason, exposes the fragility of normativity, and challenges hegemonic truths (Razaq & Sadewo, 2019).

In contemporary Indonesian literature, these themes resonate profoundly in *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* ("Feeling Smart, Not Even Stupid") by Rusdi Mathari (Mathari, 2016). Framed within the rustic humor and social dynamics of a Javanese village, the novel introduces Cak Dlahom, a character whose eccentricity and presumed madness conceal a poignant critique of societal hypocrisy and moral decay. On the surface, Cak Dlahom appears ridiculous, eliciting laughter and dismissal. Yet beneath his seemingly nonsensical remarks lies a disarming clarity, one that speaks uncomfortable truths with subversive wit. The novel thus invites readers to reconsider what constitutes intelligence, wisdom, and ultimately, sanity.

Rather than presenting madness as a medical pathology, Mathari's narrative situates it as a socially constructed category. Cak Dlahom's persona fluctuates between being the village fool and an unacknowledged sage. He disturbs the everyday logic of his community not by acts of violence or disorder, but through ironic observations, unfiltered commentary, and idiosyncratic behaviour that eludes normative frameworks. In doing so, he exposes the contradictions embedded in social norms and opens a discursive space where the "insane" becomes the voice of reason.

What further distinguishes *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* from many classical and contemporary literary representations of madness is its narrative strategy. In most literary works, madness is often narrated from the outside, diagnosed, explained, or rationalized through the voice of an omniscient narrator. The mad subject is thus rendered voiceless, objectified within a regime of narrative control. By contrast, in Mathari's work, madness speaks for itself. The character of Cak Dlahom is not merely talked about, but he speaks, jokes, protests, and reflects, often with incisive clarity. His utterances, rather than being filtered or mediated by an external authority, emerge directly from his own subjectivity. This narrative strategy transforms madness from a passive label into an active discourse of resistance. It aligns with Foucault's notion that madness, when allowed to speak, destabilizes the rational-modern

order and exposes the arbitrariness of norms that govern intelligibility (Bressler, 2011; Dobie, 2012; Foucault, 1988, 2003). Here, Cak Dlahom becomes not the object of knowledge, but the producer of counter-knowledge.

Another striking dimension lies in the paradoxical positioning of Cak Dlahom as both marginal and authoritative. In Indonesian literature, madness is frequently associated with socially marginalized figures, such as sex workers, beggars, or outcasts, whose moral transgressions or socio-economic failures mark them as deviant. A clear example is found in Emha Ainun Nadjib's short story collection *BH*, where a madwoman, formerly a sex worker, becomes a symbol of society's inability to account for emotional and spiritual trauma (Dewi & Joni, 2017). In contrast, Cak Dlahom's marginality is not rooted in moral failure but in his refusal to conform. Though perceived as an eccentric villager, he is also a man of religious knowledge, a figure whom others once sought for guidance. His descent into perceived madness, then, is not a fall from moral grace but a disruption of symbolic order, a defiant act that resists assimilation into the norms of rational behaviour. This complicates the binaries of sanity/insanity, centre/periphery, and virtue/deviance. Cak Dlahom occupies a liminal space, socially dismissed yet symbolically powerful. This tension renders his madness not as loss, but as epistemic provocation.

To explore this complexity, the present study adopts Michel Foucault's genealogical approach to madness, particularly as elaborated in his seminal work *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 2003). Foucault argues that madness is not an ontological reality, but a historical product, one shaped by institutions, language, and power. From medieval confinement to modern psychiatry, he traces the shifting apparatuses through which madness has been defined, marginalized, and "treated." Crucially, Foucault posits that what is labelled as madness often reveals more about the normative desires of society than about the individuals who are thus categorized. Madness, in this sense, becomes a site of resistance, a rupture in the rational order, a disruption of hegemonic discourse (Foucault, 1988, 2003).

This theoretical framework allows for a nuanced reading of *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* as a literary text that both reflects and interrogates the socio-discursive constructions of madness. The village setting in Mathari's novel is not merely a backdrop, but a microcosm of Indonesian society at large, where communal conformity, moral posturing, and unspoken tensions coexist beneath a veneer of harmony. In this context, Cak Dlahom's madness functions not as a deficit, but as a critical lens, a way of seeing what others refuse to acknowledge.

This study is driven by the urgency to deconstruct madness not as an essential identity, but as a floating signifier shaped by sociocultural contexts and power relations. In many societies,

including Indonesia, those who deviate from behavioural norms are quickly labelled as mad, strange, or abnormal, often without critical reflection. Yet, as the case of Toni Blank, a well-known figure once dismissed as schizophrenic and later reimagined as a folk philosopher and internet celebrity, has shown, the boundary between madness and wisdom is tenuous and politically charged (Hediyati & Candria, 2016; Nugroho, 2014, 2018; Panuju, 2010). Public perception, media narratives, and communal values play decisive roles in shaping who is heard, who is excluded, and who is "normalized."

In the same case, the character of Cak Dlahom challenges binary oppositions between the rational and irrational, the sane and the insane. His utterances, though dismissed as mad ramblings, frequently unveil more profound truths about injustice, corruption, and human folly. He mocks the rational world, not through rebellion, but through a kind of strategic foolishness that disarms authority and disorients logic. Thus, the novel offers a powerful allegory for rethinking madness, not as a deficiency, but as a site of epistemic critique.

The originality of this research lies in its focus on the socio-discursive dimension of madness in Mathari's work, a subject that has hitherto been underexplored. While previous studies have primarily centered on the novel's religious or spiritual dimensions (Finanti et al., 2021), this study shifts attention toward its subversive engagement with social marginality and discursive power. Employing Foucault's theory, the novel is read not merely as a repository of values but as a dynamic field in which meanings are contested, subverted, and reimagined.

Ultimately, this study contributes to two broader conversations. First, it enriches Indonesian literary criticism by foregrounding madness as a critical trope with socio-political implications. Second, it advances the discourse on how literature reflects, constructs, and potentially transforms public understandings of deviance, normality, and otherness. In a world increasingly obsessed with order, efficiency, and standardization, narratives like *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* urge us to pause and ask: who defines reason, and who gets to be heard? In the figure of Cak Dlahom, we do not merely encounter a madman; we confront the possibility that madness may be the last refuge of truth in a world too afraid to laugh at its own delusions.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Previous studies on literary representations of madness have primarily focused on female characters, Western settings, or religious and pedagogical values in Indonesian texts. For instance, Asri (2020), in her study, "The Construction of Madness in the Novel Lady Audley's

Secret," examined how Victorian cultural norms positioned Lucy's manipulative temperament as a form of madness. Although insightful, this study highlights the gendered dimensions of madness within a specific cultural and historical context. Similarly, Anggradinata (2018) explored the intersection of power and madness in Lu Xun's *A Madman's Diary*, applying Michel Foucault's theory to highlight institutionalized judgment toward characters who deviate from societal expectations. While both studies engage Foucault's theoretical model, their literary contexts and focal points —female hysteria and state oppression — differ substantially from the present study's sociocultural landscape.

A closer comparison emerges in Nurcholish's (2015) work on *Kalatidha* by Seno Gumira Ajidarma, where the construction of madness discourse reveals contradictions within dominant paradigms. Yet even here, the study focuses on the destabilization of structured discourses, without closely examining madness as a performative identity or a tool of subversive critique within micro-social spaces such as rural communities. In contrast, the present study highlights how village society, with its everyday norms and informal power structures, discursively constructs and perpetuates the label of "madness."

Turning to the literary work under analysis, Rusdi Mathari's *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya*, existing research has primarily examined the text through the lens of religious values and its potential as teaching material. Faridzi (2022) and Finanti et al. (2021) focused on moral and religious themes embedded in the narrative, arguing for the work's pedagogical value in the high school curriculum. Other studies (Anwar, 2020; Aristama, 2019) follow a similar trajectory, treating the series as a repository of Islamic ethical guidance. These interpretations, while valuable for educational purposes, overlook the rich sociological and philosophical dimensions of the text, particularly its commentary on the construction of marginality and madness within local cultural discourse.

This study fills a significant gap by shifting the critical focus away from didactic religiosity toward a sociocultural and discursive reading of madness. Employing Michel Foucault's theory of madness as a discursive formation shaped by power and normativity, this study analyses how *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* constructs the character of Cak Dlahom, a marginal figure often labelled "crazy" by his community, as a site of ironic resistance. Cak Dlahom's utterances, absurd yet piercing, function as disruptions within the accepted moral and social order, thereby exposing the contingency and hypocrisy of communal norms. His madness is not pathological, but performative; yet, it serves as both a critique and an alternative epistemology.

Unlike previous studies that approached the text primarily for its religious content, this research repositions the narrative as a Foucauldian critique (1988) of the social mechanisms that produce and maintain labels of insanity. It also introduces the specific context of Javanese kampung (village) life as a unique cultural framework in which discursive power operates informally yet pervasively. The study, therefore, offers an original contribution by revealing how madness, within this cultural microcosm, is not merely a deviation from normativity but a means of narrating hidden truths and confronting collective denial.

In doing so, this research not only contributes to the expanding field of Indonesian literary criticism but also to broader debates on how madness is constructed, negotiated, and resisted within literary discourse. It challenges the assumption that rural literature merely reflects local values; instead, it posits that such literature can function as a critical space in which the politics of normativity, power, and social marginality are subtly but powerfully interrogated.

The novelty of this study lies in three significant departures from prior scholarship, each of which offers a distinct contribution to the literary discourse on madness. First, in terms of the object of analysis, while most previous studies on madness in literature have focused on Western or classical texts, this study examines a contemporary Indonesian narrative rooted in village life. This context remains underexplored mainly through the lens of critical theory. By focusing on *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari, the study introduces a culturally grounded yet academically neglected literary work into scholarly conversations about madness.

Second, from an analytical perspective, this research diverges from the dominant trend of applying Michel Foucault's theory to themes of institutional power or political domination. Instead, it extends Foucault's framework to investigate how madness is discursively produced within informal, communal, and everyday interactions in a rural setting. This localized and culturally specific adaptation of Foucault's ideas (Foucault, 2003; Razaq & Sadewo, 2019) enables a deeper understanding of how power operates not only through state or scientific institutions, but also through social labeling and communal narratives.

Third, this study contributes to existing scholarship by offering a new interpretation of *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya*, a text that has thus far been predominantly analysed through the lens of religious values and educational utility. Departing from this trend, the current research foregrounds the text's subversive potential, positioning it as a site of epistemic resistance. It highlights how the portrayal of madness in the character of Cak Dlahom functions as a deliberate narrative strategy to critique, mock, and destabilize dominant social discourses.

By repositioning madness as a constructed and performative identity shaped by communal discourse, this study fills a critical gap in the scholarship on Rusdi Mathari's work and enriches broader discussions on the representation of madness in Indonesian literature.

METHOD

Methods are the steps and strategies used by researchers when conducting research, typically in stages (Lesmana et al., 2021). The stories in a book *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari (Mathari, 2016) are divided into two parts: part I (consisting of 14 titles) and part II (consisting of 16 titles). The object used in this research is the eighth printing, April 2020, printed and published by Mojok Book Publishers. This research is qualitative because it focuses on meaning and interpretation (Selden, 1996). Meanwhile, the data is presented in the form of a descriptive narrative.

The data collection technique used is a literature study to identify and mark data related to the research problems. Next, the data collection process was carried out through note-taking and sorting out sentences from the book *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* that are relevant to answering the research problem. The method used to analyze the data is textual analysis, drawing on Michel Foucault's theory (Foucault, 2003)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Michel Foucault's Concept of Madness

Michel Foucault, in his concept of madness, stated that it is not only a matter of a medical problem but also related to certain social norms and discourses in society (Foucault, 2003). The discourse in society can vary from time to time. Some are constructed by elite groups to eliminate parties they dislike. These elite groups can take various forms, including government officials, scientists, doctors, religious figures, and many others with diverse interests. They set boundaries between what is considered crazy and what is not.

This phenomenon began when an epidemic of leprosy hit Europe in the Middle Ages. The plague caused widespread anxiety among people, and madness filled the void left by the absence of moral values in society at that time. People set values and boundaries between healthy and sick, normal and crazy, not to mention those related to poverty and unemployment. Those who do not belong to any category are considered crazy (have no moral values).

In the classical period, between the 17th and 18th centuries, madness was considered a social problem. One is labelled as crazy or mad if they act without reason, and any ideas coming

from this kind of person would not be taken into account. At this point, crazy people are those with no purpose, no reasoning, tramps, convicts, and those considered useless and disturbing public order. Individuals in these categories were assigned to a designated area. At first, they were let loose, free to wander around. Over time, they were quarantined on a ship that was left in the ocean. This placement was then replaced by a new system, where the crazy people were placed in a building called a correction house, which was then replaced with a mental hospital. The mental hospital became a legal instrument of modern awareness. The concept of this place is to discipline the mad to work, in addition to instilling moral values, obedience, and order.

In the 18th century, madness was thought to be a social disturbance, and the hospital was the court to declare the status of normal or crazy for people, then sentence them behind its walls. Madness in this century refers to attitudes and behaviors that are contrary to existing norms. This mad concept was then relative, depending on the construction in people's minds at that time, depending on the epistémè, and knowledge that continuously develops, competing with discourses in discontinuity. Using the concept of madness, the researchers analyze the book *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari to identify the discourses of madness presented in the text.

Cak Dlahom's Madness in *Merasa Pintar Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari

Cak Dlahom is the main character in the book *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari. Cak Dlahom is described as an older man whom some people think is crazy in the area where he lives. He lives alone without a single family member or relative. Cak Dlahom's daily life is described as simply hanging around the village where he lives, which is in a hut near the kennel owned by the village head.

This book is divided into two parts, namely the "First Ramadan" and "the Second Ramadan". Each part tells a story with a time setting that spans from the start of Ramadan to Eid. Since the first Ramadan, Cak Dlahom has been described as insane. *"Mereka menyambut Ramadan penuh sukacita, tapi Cak Dlahom yang dianggap kurang waras oleh orang-orang di kampungnya hanya berdiri di depan pagar tembok masjid"* (They welcomed Ramadan full of joy, but Cak Dlahom, whom people in his village think insane, only stood in front of the mosque's fence) (Mathari, 2016, p. 3).

Cak Dlahom's standing position outside the mosque's fence is a form of boundary that conveys that he is not part of the residents who, at that time, are inside the mosque area. Cak Dlahom was said to have only stood while the other people in the mosque area were carrying out community service activities, cleaning the mosque.

At the beginning of the story, in a chapter entitled ‘Do you really miss Ramadan?’, there is a barrier set between Cak Dlahom and the residents. This barrier is a form of marker that distinguishes between Cak Dlahom and its residents, separating those who are considered crazy from those who are not, and those who do not contribute from those who do.

> *“Orang-orang maklum. Anak-anak tertawa. Mereka semua menganggap Cak Dlahom sedang kumat dan tak memedulikannya, kecuali Mat Piti”* (Mathari, 2016, p. 4).
>
> “People understand. The kids laugh. They all thought Cak Dlahom was having a relapse and did not care about him, except for Mat Piti” (Mathari, 2016, p. 4).

Cak Dlahom’s madness was confirmed by the people’s assumption that he was having a relapse. Relapse here implies that Cak Dlahom is a sick person, not a healthy one, unlike the others who are healthy.

In the next chapter, ‘Convert to Islam, Then Break the Fast of Ramadan’, the reasons why the villagers put Cak Dlahom aside, considering him insane so that children often annoy him and laugh at his behaviour, are explained.

> *“Kadang dia dijumpai di pinggir kali, meracau berbicara pada air. Kadang ia memanjat pohon dan mengaji keras-keras. Kadang dia tidur di kendang kambing milik Pak Lurah, menciumi kambing-kambing lalu menangis. Kadang dia mendatangi masjid dan hanya berdiri memperhatikan orang-orang yang salat dengan tatapan mata yang bisa menjatuhkan cecak di dinding* (Mathari, 2016, p. 10)*.”*
>
> Sometimes he is found on the edge of the river, babbling and talking to the water. Sometimes he climbed a tree and recited Qur’an aloud. Sometimes he sleeps in the village head’s goat barn, kisses the goats and then cries. Sometimes he would come to the mosque and just stand watching the people praying with eyes that could drop a lizard on the wall (Mathari, 2016, p. 10).

Not infrequently, children also throw stones at Cak Dlahom as described in the chapter “Cak Dlahom Confesses He was a Dog”. Apart from throwing stones at Cak Dlahom, the children shout loudly saying “Dlahom is Crazy! Crazy Dlahom!” because they witnessed Cak Dlahom being in the kennel owned by the village chief with a dog. He hugged, talked to and kissed the dog and the goat alternately.

Cak Dlahom is described as fond of doing things beyond the expectations of the villagers. It is described in the chapter ‘Giving Charity to Mosquitoes’, that one day at sunset, Cak Dlahom was naked while lying on his back between two graves which were located right behind the village mosque. This was done to give charity to mosquitoes. This action instantly attracts people’s attention.

Not far from the mosque, Cak Dlahom was once described as sounding *Adzan,* making the call to prayer, at 11 pm. This is presented in the chapter 'Who's Crazy? Who is Perverted?'. This incident made the residents even more irritated and said that Cak Dlahom was crazy and misguided. The residents flocked to the mosque that night, planning to drive away Cak Dlahom.

In the chapter 'Burning Heaven, Watering Hell', it is told that Cak Dlahom was running back and forth on the small road in front of the mosque. He did the activity while saying, "Woe…! Woe…!" from the end of the Tarawih prayer until the people finish the Fajr prayer. His words seemed to be directed towards the mosque. People have been watching him since the night but only Mat Piti managed to stop him at dawn.

In another story, entitled "Humans are the Same but Wasp Stings Can Make Them Different", there was a furore before breaking fast time. Residents leaving the house witnessed Cak Dlahom walking calmly even though he was surrounded by wasps of a dangerous type. Some people were screaming for someone to help Cak Dlahom. The residents were amazed and sad at the same time, but the children still followed him while cheering behind Cak Dlahom. He walked back and forth several times in this state until *Isya* was approaching

Cak Dlahom seemed to have a habit of pacing back and forth to ask for attention. This also happens in the title "Pak Haji, Mrs. Fasting… Mbah *Syahadat*". It is said that since the village head returned from umrah, Cak Dlahom visited the village head's house but only walked back and forth outside the fence. Of course, his behaviour became a spectacle for the children while teasing, "Dlahom is crazy...Dlahom is crazy...". Cak Dlahom was pacing back and forth while saying, "Mr. Haji, Mrs. Fasting" and the residents think he was having a relapse. They think that he is sick.

The construction of madness in this book consists of statements and a priori treatment by residents, both directly and indirectly towards Cak Dlahom. The man was treated as a sick person (crazy) who could relapse at any time. Cak Dlahom's madness is because residents think that he is a different person, not the same as the rest of the residents who generally carry out activities together and have a conventional mindset. This caused Cak Dlahom to be ridiculed, ostracized and neglected.

The Discourse of Cak Dlahom and Society's *Epistémè* in the Book of *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari

Cak Dlahom was considered crazy because he had a mindset and behaviour that was different from other residents. Some discourses on the madness are presented in a appropriate manner, starting from the cause to the solution. In the first part, Cak Dlahom questions Mat Piti's honesty in welcoming Ramadan, whether he really misses the holy month, whether Mat

Piti is a Muslim, and whether Mat Piti has ever met Allah. These questions were asked by Cak Dlahom regarding how Mat Piti welcome Ramadan, which is in contrast to residents who welcomed Ramadan by cleaning the mosque area and putting up billboards that read, "Welcome, Ramadan. We miss you.

The mindset and behaviour of Cak Dlahom are indeed different from the other villagers. He has unique ways of conveying things that are important. Several times, he carried out activities that attracted a lot of attention to convey his message. For example, in the chapter "Giving charity to mosquitoes", he has an interesting discourse, he is naked in an open space and deliberately lets the mosquitoes suck his blood to show that there are others' rights within us. On another occasion, still regarding charity, Cak Dlahom conveyed a message not to count what was given, to let the alms pass without being remembered. He analogizes that giving alms is like defecating and urinating, as a necessity that we will not hold on to.

Once, in 'Mr Hajj, Mrs Fasting, Mbah Syahadat', Cak Dlahom delivered a protest to the residents, especially those who helped supporting the conditions which according to Cak Dlahom were not right. Cak Dlahom seeks attention to residents who exclaim legitimacy, recognition and the luxurious things in life but ignore the important things in society. At that time, Cak Dlahom was busy pacing in front of the Lurah's house who had returned from Umrah. He protested against the titles Mr and Mrs Hajj.

> *"Kenapa yang harus dihirmati hanya orang yang berhaji?"*
> *"Maksud sampeyan?"*
> *"Kenapa orang yang salat tidak dipanggil Pak Salat? Orang yang puasa dipanggil Pak Puasa? Orang yang berzakat dipanggil Pak Zakat?"* (Mathari, 2016, p. 137).
>
> Why should only those who perform Hajj be respected?"
> "You mean?"
> "Why aren't people who pray called Mr Salat? People who fast are called Mr Fasting? The person who gives zakat is called Mr. Zakat?" (Mathari, 2016, p. 137)

Cak Dlahom sparked the discussion with the questions he had. Not only in this title, but also in all titles, there is a scene where Cak Dlahom asks questions to his interlocutor to discuss something. He leads his interlocutors with opinions on the topic, making them think about the truth coming from his mouth, a person who is marginalized by the society because they are considered crazy. Most of Cak Dlahom's interlocutors are part of the community who are looking for the truth, looking for messages from an incident, looking for answers to the questions that are on their minds. For example, Mat Piti who asked about the existence of God, Romlah who asked about a soul mate, or Cak Dullah who was looking for peace.

The climax of this series is in part II, when Bunali's wife dies. Cak Dlahom blamed the residents, and at the same time asked God for forgiveness for the negligent attitude of the people. In the second part of Ramadan, there is a series of events, starting from the death of Bunali, followed by Bunali's children who dropped out of school, to Bunali's wife who committed suicide. Of course, this series of events received more attention from Cak Dlahom. He regretted the attitude of the society who were ignorant of the neighbors' condition. In the title "He Is Sick and You Are Busy Building a Mosque", Cak Dlahom carried a sack, then spilled the contents into the mosque's courtyard. He did this several times until the head of the neighbourhood reprimanded him when he learned that what had been spilled was grave soil.

> *"Cak, itu tanah kuburan untuk apa dibawa kemari?*
> *"Tidakkah masjid ini butuh sumbangan untuk diperluas, Pak RT?*
> *"Iya, tapi tidak butuh tanah, Cak ..."*
> *"Jadi butuhnya apa? Sumbangan uang? Sumbangan semen? Sumbangan besi? Kayu? .... Tanah ini dari kuburan janda Bunali. Dia menitip pesan agar tanah kuburannya disumbangkan ke masjid agar masjid ini bisa megah. Lalu apakah kita akan menolaknya?"*
>
> "Cak, what is this burial ground for?
> "Doesn't this mosque need donations to be expanded, Pak RT?
> "Yes, but it does not need land, Cak..."
> "So what contribution do you need? Money? Cement? Iron? Wood? …. This land is from the grave of Bunali's widow. He left a message that his burial ground was donated to the mosque so that this mosque could be magnificent. Then are we going to reject it?"

Village residents are currently intensively renovating the mosque. Those who have more money, compete to contribute. According to Cak Dlahom, this was a mistake, because Bunali's wife was sick but they ignored her. Cak Dlahom also showed his frustration with the Lurah who had finished umrah for the umpteenth time. He questioned the condition of Bunali's wife who was sick and her child who had dropped out of school even though she worked at the village head's house.

Discursive Discontinuities and the Collapse of *Epistémè*: The Shifting Perception of Madness in *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* by Rusdi Mathari

While the previous sections have elaborated on how madness in *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* operates as both a performative and discursive force within the narrative, a further dimension emerges when the text is read as a serialized body of work. The serialized book of Rusdi Mathari's storytelling introduces discursive discontinuities that disrupt linear conceptions of character development, narrative coherence, and epistemic closure. These discontinuities, far from being structural weaknesses, should be understood as aesthetic and

ideological gestures that mirror the fragmented, instability of madness itself, both as lived experience and discursive construct.

A notable discursive discontinuity emerges throughout this serialized narrative: the *epistemé* of the village community is persistently challenged by the discourse articulated by Cak Dlahom. The label of madness initially attributed to Cak Dlahom gradually fades, as several key community members begin to align themselves with the narratives he presents. That they are Mat Piti, Romlah, Gus Mut, Cak Dullah, the Head of Neighbourhood Association (Pak Ketua RT/Rukun Tetangga), and eventually the Head of Urban Village (Pak Lurah), these figures begin to accept Cak Dlahom's "difference" as a legitimate form of truth. The very madness once imposed upon him is slowly retracted by those who had previously enforced the label. Paradoxically, the community's own *epistemé*, its norms and assumptions, begins to resemble a form of collective madness.

This transformation is particularly evident in the episode where Mat Piti engages in a deep and philosophical discussion with Cak Dlahom during a visit to the home of the recently-returned pilgrim, the Head of Urban Village (Pak Lurah):

> *"Aku ingin tahu sejak kapan Pak Lurah punya nama baru."*
> *"Nama baru gimana? Nama dia ya tetap Sidik Khairil."*
> *"Di depan Namanya ada haji."*
> *"Pak Lurah kan memang haji, Cak? Sudah lama dia memasang haji di depan namanya."*
> *"Bukan, Cak. Itu kebiasaan. Orang yang sudah berhaji biasanya memakai gelar haji. Dipanggil Pak Haji."*
> *"Jadi kebiasaan, Mat?"*
> *"Untuk menghormati, Cak."*
> *"Kenapa yang harus dihormati hanya orang yang berhaji?"*
> *"Maksud sampean?"*
> *"Kenapa orang yang salat tidak dipanggil Pak Salat? Orang yang berpuasa dipanggil Pak Puasa? Orang yang berzakat, Pak Zakat?"*
> *"Ah sampean ada-ada saja. Ndak lazim, Cak, orang salat dipanggil Pak Salat."*
>
> "I wonder since when Pak Lurah got a new name."
> "What is new name? No, his name is still Sidik Khairil."
> "But now it starts with 'Hajj'."
> "Well, he is a hajj, Cak. He's used that title for a long time."
> "That's not what I mean, Cak. It's just a habit. People who've been on the pilgrimage usually add the title 'Hajj' in front of their names. They're called Pak Haji."
> "So it's just a habit, Mat?"
> "It's a form of respect, Cak."

> "Why is it only the pilgrims who deserve that respect?"
> "What do you mean?"
> "Why don't we call someone who prays every day 'Pak Salat'? Or someone who fasts 'Pak Puasa'? Or someone who gives alms 'Pak Zakat'?"
> "Ah, you're being ridiculous, Cak. It's not normal to call someone 'Pak Salat.'"

Cak Dlahom disrupts the prevailing *epistemé* surrounding the honorific "Mr. Hajj" commonly used for those who have completed the pilgrimage. By invoking the other pillars of Islam, such as prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, he questions the logic of symbolic respect tied exclusively to one act. His irony unveils a deeper critique, that is the arbitrary hierarchy of religious expressions in communal consciousness. This dialog illustrates that Cak Dlahom is not merely rejecting dominant structures, but actively engaging in symbolic deconstruction of what is considered sacred within the social-religious order. He infiltrates everyday language, particularly the habitual invocation of "Mr. Hajj", and strategically reconfigures its meaning. Through such rhetorical gestures, madness becomes a discursive strategy: not a deficiency of reason, but a deliberate form of epistemic sabotage against taken-for-granted symbolic authority.

In another dialogue, when Gus Mut visits his daughter Romlah, he converses with Cak Dlahom about death. Cak Dlahom recounts a story about a man who once pleaded with the Prophet Sulaiman a.s. to be flown far away in order to escape death. The story culminates with Cak Dlahom's spiritual assertion:

> *"Kematian apa itu, Cak?"*
> *"Kematian nafsumu."*
> *"Saya kurang paham, cak…."*
> *"Manusia diminta mematikan terlebih dahulu nafsu-nafsu mereka sebelum jasad mereka mati. Setidaknya agar nafsu mereka pernah merasakan kematian."*
>
> "What kind of death do you mean, Cak?"
> "The death of your *nafsu (desires)*."
> "I don't quite understand, Cak…"
> "Humans are asked to let their desires die before their bodies do. At the very least, so that their *nafsu* may come to know what death feels like."

This statement transcends spiritual wisdom and offers a counter-discourse to the dominant religious culture in the village, which tends to emphasize ritual over moral substance. In this community, religiosity is often expressed through symbolic acts, such as mosque construction, honorific titles, religious banners, while social ethics such as compassion, empathy, and self-restraint are neglected. Cak Dlahom thus emerges as a provocateur who challenges not only

the social system that marginalizes him, but also the performative religiosity that dominates communal life.

From a Foucauldian perspective (2003), particularly concerning discourse and subjectivity, this narrative illustrates how Cak Dlahom produces knowledge from a marginal position. Although labelled as "mad," he actively challenges and pressures a shift within the community's *epistémè*. He formulates an alternative discourse that reaches into the existential core of human life. His madness not only communicates spiritual insight but also forces society to confront its own collective delusions. Those are symbolic fixations, obsession with public recognition, and failure to attend to essential realities.

A further example is found in his response to Warkono and Busairi, who express a desire to become wealthy so they might give more in charity. Cak Dlahom critiques this aspiration, reversing the assumption that generosity is exclusive to the affluent:

> *"Orang kaya bersedekah, beramal, berinfak, itu sudah semestinya, Ri, War. Sudah sewajarnya. Biasa saja. Tidak ada yang istimewa. Sebagian dari mereka bahkan bersedekah minimalis: hanya memenuhi hitungan yang ditentukan yang ditentukan oleh syariat. Mereka pelit. Kikir. Menumpuk-numpuk dan menghitung-hitung hartanya."*
>
> "The rich give alms, do charity, donate, well, that's how it should be, Ri, War. It's expected. Nothing special. Some of them even give just the bare minimum: only what's required by religious law. They're stingy. Miserly. Hoarding their wealth and counting every coin."

Here, he dismantles the ideological framing of the "generous rich," emphasizing that minimal compliance with religious obligations should not be glorified. His critique repositions charity not as a grand gesture of privilege but as an ethical imperative. These serial discontinuities reflect a broader epistemic shift: society's perception of Cak Dlahom evolves from ridicule to recognition. Initially, the dominant discourse regards deviation from ritual formality, social participation, and normative behaviour as madness. But through his probing questions and symbolic acts, Cak Dlahom gradually dismantles the very logic that defines madness.

At this stage, the serial narrative performs a crucial function: madness is no longer simply a theme, but becomes an instrument of discursive reconfiguration. Through subtle shifts in how others respond to Cak Dlahom, the serialized structure enacts a broader epistemological disruption that mirrors the Foucauldian view of discourse as inherently unstable and subject to redefinition.

The most dramatic transformation occurs when Cak Dlahom pours cemetery soil onto the mosque courtyard. Initially condemned by the villagers, he explains:

> *"Cak, itu tanah kuburan untuk apa dibawa kemari?"*
> *"Tidakkah masjid ini butuh sumbangan untuk diperluas, Pak RT?"*
> *"Iya, tapi tidak butuh tanah, Cak…"*
> *"Jadi butuhnya apa? Sumbangan uang? Sumbangan semen? Sumbangan besi? Kayu? … Tanah ini dari kuburan janda Bunali. Dia menitip pesan agar tanah kuburnya disumbangkan ke masjid agar masjid ini bisa megah. Lalu apakah kita akan menolaknya?"*
>
> "Cak, why did you bring graveyard soil here?"
> "Doesn't the mosque need donations for its expansion, Pak RT?"
> "Yes, but it doesn't need soil, Cak…"
> "So what does it need? Money? Cement? Steel? Wood? … This soil came from the grave of Bunali's widow. She left a message asking for her grave soil to be donated to the mosque so it could stand tall. So—are we going to reject it?"

This moment marks a narrative rupture that compels moral introspection. The villagers, who had previously ignored Bunali's widow and her child, are now confronted with the ethical contradictions of their religious priorities. Cak Dlahom's act foregrounds forgotten duties toward the vulnerable and reorients communal consciousness toward more humane values. This form of discursive rupture affirms Foucault's assertion that discourse is always vulnerable to renegotiation (Foucault, 2003). In this serialized text, Cak Dlahom becomes an agent of transformation, destabilizing the dominant *epistemé* while proposing an alternative discourse grounded in ethics, spirituality, and humanity. He not only disrupts the status quo but also creates a space for reflective reorientation.

Ultimately, the series offers more than a narrative about a marginal figure. It presents a narrative of resistance. As dominant discourse begins to be disintegrated, what was once considered peripheral becomes central to the formation of a new collective awareness. This discursive discontinuity highlights how madness is not absolute but socially constructed, and, crucially, how it can be strategically unsettled through subversive, critical acts such as those performed by Cak Dlahom.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how madness in Rusdi Mathari's *Merasa Pintar, Bodoh Saja Tak Punya* functions not merely as a thematic element but as a site of epistemic contestation within the narrative structure. First, the portrayal of Cak Dlahom reveals a significant departure from conventional literary representations of madness. Unlike characters who are narrated about or

pathologized from the outside, Cak Dlahom articulates his own experiences, functioning as a discursive subject who actively speaks, critiques, and repositions the notion of reason within his social environment. His madness is not reduced to irrationality, but rather becomes a performative mode of resistance, a lens through which the contradictions of communal values are exposed.

Second, the interaction between Cak Dlahom's discourse and the prevailing *epistémè* of the village community reflects the Foucauldian idea that power operates through regimes of truth that marginalize those who deviate from accepted norms. While the community initially rejects and ridicules Cak Dlahom, perceiving him as mad, over time, his discourse begins to infiltrate and disrupt these normative boundaries. Figures of authority, such as Pak RT and Pak Lurah, reassume and reveal the instability of the epistemic framework to defined madness.

Third, the serialized structure of the text enables a narrative discontinuity that mirrors the instability of social truths. The perception of madness shifts across episodes, revealing the socially constructed nature of both deviance and reason. In this process, Cak Dlahom becomes not only a figure of critique but also a catalyst for epistemic reorientation. His presence subverts established hierarchies and invites a rethinking of what constitutes sanity, piety, and moral legitimacy. Ultimately, the text demonstrates that madness, when allowed to speak on its own terms, can serve as a radical discursive force that challenges dominant narratives and reclaims the margins as spaces of insight and transformation.

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