

## Images in cultural psychiatry

**Free from *pasung*: A story of chaining and freedom in Indonesia told through painting, poetry and narration.**

Anto SG, Erminia Colucci

**Abstract.** *Thousands of people worldwide live in isolation, chained, or inside “animal cages”, naked, undernourished and often living in their own excrements because of mental health problems. This has been identified as one of the most flagrant continuing abuses of the human rights of people with mental illness, particularly in low-resource settings where mental health services are extremely scarce and inadequate. In Indonesia the term pasung refers to the physical restraint or confinement of “criminals, crazy and dangerously aggressive people”. In this article, ‘Anto’, a young man who has been kept in pasung several times, shares his personal lived experience through painting, narration, and poetry.*

**Keywords:** Restraint, confinement, seclusion, human rights, abuse, mental illness, mental health, Indonesia, *pasung*, LMIC.

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**INTRODUCTION** The physical confinement and restraint of people with mental health problems has a long and inglorious history, and virtually every society has restrained people with mental problems at some point in time (Drew *et al*, 2011; World Health Organization, 2005). Philippe Pinel is credited with having released the mentally ill from their chains at the Bicêtre and the Salpêtrière hospitals in Paris at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Minas & Diatri, 2008). Yet physical restraint continues in psychiatric hospitals, religious shrines, healing sanctuaries and other settings in many parts of the world (*ibidem*; WHO, 2005). In Indonesia, such restraint methods (generally known by the term *pasung*) include shackles, rope, wooden stocks, cages, and the locking of people in confined and usually isolated spaces (Minas & Cohen, 2007; Minas & Diatri, 2008; Suryani *et al*, 2011; Tyas, 2008). These methods are applied (also in combination) to men, women and children (Minas & Diatri, 2008) who show certain attitudes, behaviours and emotional expressions that depart from ‘normality’ (Tyas, 2008). In most cases, the decision to restrain is initiated by members of the family, although in some instances it is supported or imposed (and maintained) by community leaders (Broch, 2001; Minas & Diatri, 2008; Puteh *et al*, 2011; Suryani *et al*, 2011; Tyas, 2008).

In March 2009, the Deputy Governor of Aceh announced the commencement and funding for the *Aceh Bebas Pasung* [“free from *pasung*”] project. In August 2010, the Director of Mental Health, Ministry of Health Indonesia announced a program that would eliminate *pasung* from all of Indonesia by 2014. On October 10 of that same year, during the World Mental Health Day, the Minister of Health of the Republic of Indonesia announced the *Indonesia Bebas Pasung* program.

In 2012, I (Colucci, 2013) undertook an ethnographic photo/film-documentary project about *pasung* and the free from *pasung* programs in Indonesia in collaboration with the Granada Centre for Visual Anthropology (University of Manchester) and the Global and Cultural Mental Health Unit (School of

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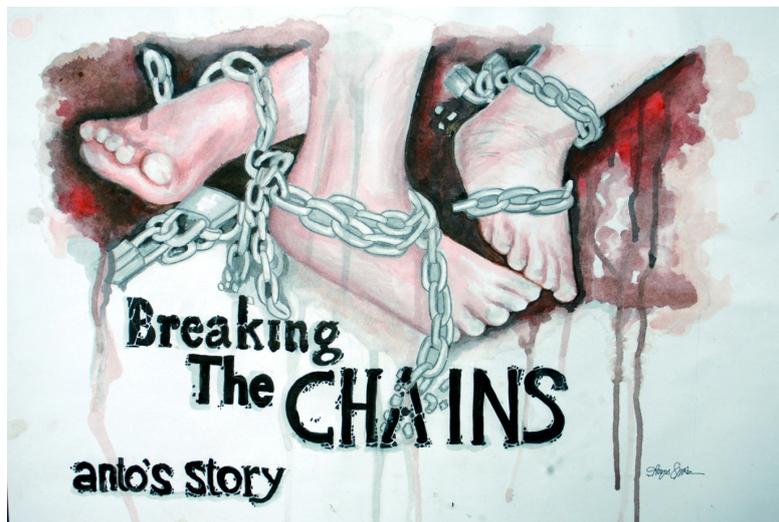
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Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne). The documentary project “Breaking the chains” aimed to contribute to an understanding of *pasung* and the reasons behind this practice. It also aimed to tell an original story about the social and political activism being carried out at several levels, from consumer volunteer organizations to the *pasung* survivors and their communities, in order to eradicate this form of human rights abuse and give freedom and dignity to people with a mental illness.

During this ethnographic fieldwork, I (Colucci) was connected to a young man in the East side of Java island, who goes by his artistic name, *Anto sg*, and went to spend a few days in his house with him and his parents. From this encounter, the short collaborative documentary ‘Breaking the chains: Anto’s story’, which Anto co-directed, was born. This testimony-style documentary depicts the subjective lived experience of Anto as a young man who was restrained and chained in his bedroom but was then released and reintegrated in the community as a self-taught artist and English student. In the following pages, Anto tells his first-hand story about *pasung* using a combination of narration, drawing, painting and poetry (**Note 1**).



## ANTO’S STORY



*I lived in a village that had very low awareness about mental health.  
They use one word to describe mental illness, “crazy”.*

My childhood was just like other children’s, although I had some experience of bullying because of my looks and the way I spoke. I was too soft for a boy, not masculine enough, so they called me a bad nickname. It happened until I reached my teenage years. Some people in my neighbourhood often said words that disparaged me. They used to call me “fag”, it made me have low self-esteem. I rarely reacted to defend myself; I couldn’t do anything. It was all suppressed down in my heart. Despite my family’s poor economic conditions, I moved on to reach my dream. I felt that I had some dignity when I got good marks in my education.

### **Graduated from vocational high school in 1997**

I grew up as friendly, kind, calm, and smart young man, but I was a shy person. I had a crisis of confidence because of my family’s background. I always ranked highly in class, and in junior high school I became a class champion several times. My ranking was also good in high school. Friends thought that I was pretty smart at English. When I was in school, I loved English class more than anything else. I wanted to be an English teacher. It was my dream. I still remember how excited I was

as I rode my rusty bicycle everyday to school. School was always a happy time for me. I was always fascinated by English lessons.

It feels different when my tongue says some strange words that have a meaning for people in another part of the world. My hobby is listening to English lessons' broadcasts on Radio Australia or a similar program on the BBC, and other foreign radio broadcasts. I realized that it's an unusual hobby that not many children had. I remembered when, in the morning, I eagerly turned on the SW radio waves to listen to the English-language broadcast. I felt like I was in another world when I tuned in those broadcasts.

I wanted to go to regular high school but my parents did not allow it. Instead, I was told to go to a vocational school so I could get a job. They said I would never go to university. We could not afford it, our income was barely enough to live. My parents often paid my school fees late.

My father is a poor peasant, and his only skill is gardening. He plants rice crops and so does my mother. Their days are spent running farming activities. The fact that I never went to university tore me apart. I would have to accept this reality. But I was not able to accept it.

I have one sibling, my sister, and she is smarter than me. She was a person to look up to when it came to study.

I was depressed a lot at the time. Usually my parents would blame me for not being able to accept our living conditions. But it was very reasonable given my parents' education and their capacity. They were overwhelmed about how to earn money, had a headache everyday about our economic life. I ended up not knowing myself. I did not put my foot on the ground.

I buried all my dreams, as my mum usually said, "Never hope for anything that we are not able to reach. Poor people shouldn't have dreams." I graduated from vocational school in 1997 and I got a job replacement. I was accepted as an employee at the paper factory nearby. I was placed at the laboratory and quality control department.

Within a year my desire to go to college reappeared. When I expressed this to my parents, they said it's up to me, I should take all the risks and the consequences, I own that responsibility, and they cannot help with anything, especially about the fee. So, I began dreaming again. With all my savings, I registered at a university in the outer city.

I worked night shifts and went to the campus in the afternoon. I was very exhausted. I was becoming weak; my body was not strong enough for all of my daily activities. Sometimes I slept during my shift and got sick many times. I finally ended up in hospital with chronic fatigue. I got typhoid fever.

One of my co-workers complained about me sleeping during my night shift. I was actually sleeping at another area but they did not know that I did it after my shift was over. They did not accept my justification so I was given a warning letter. I thought I'd better get out of this job rather than get fired, so I resigned.

It meant that I did not have any income to pay my college when exam time arrived. I didn't know how to solve this problem. An unexpected opportunity came up: a friend asked me to join a multi-level marketing business where I was required to invest money to make a profit. I mortgaged my only possession, an old motorcycle, to join. Unfortunately it was a fraud. Instead of making a profit, I ended up broke. My parents were mad with me for wasting money instead of using it to fund a wedding party for my sister.

I was crushed thinking about my failure. My mind raged about my future goals.

With my shattered dreams, I finally withdrew in despair. I ran to God. I prayed endlessly, prayed and prayed every day. I never left my room. I moved into depression. I became very sensitive. My emotions were easily ignited when I spoke with people. I went to the mosque when usually I did not. I was praying too much and people saw it as an unusual behaviour. Rumours that I acted weird and was oversensitive began to spread.

My neighbours started to talk about it. The children around me began to refer to me as crazy. Teenagers in my neighbourhood were clearly yelling at me, "You are crazy!". It was like being thrown into a very deep well. I felt worthless, rejected, wasted, and ignored.



*“Ignored”*

It was about a month and I couldn't sleep anymore. My thoughts were about my crushed future goals, my dignity had been torn apart. I felt so lost. My neighbours started to treat me differently. They used to say hello but not anymore. Some of them looked away when they saw me. When they did look at me, it was with strange eyes.

Feelings of sadness haunted me. I was feeling numb. All the things that used to make me happy, felt like nothing. I was sick of all this. People stared at me with weird looks. I got cynical stares from everybody. I was so despicable that people no longer thought of me as sane. I felt that I did not deserve to be here. I must go to a place where I'm not judged by people and called "crazy". My chest was full with anger and hurt feelings. I could barely breathe. So, I ran away.

### **First runaway**

It was about September 1999. I ran away from home with some money that I got from my friend. I took a bus to Surabaya. I was very sad about what my future would be. My mind seemed to drift; I had no direction. I just followed where my feet took me. I shed tears on my journey to nowhere every time I remembered people's rejections. My tears flooded over my cheeks.

In my chaotic mind, I just wanted to get out of my village, as far away as I could. I was shocked with this feeling. I took this wounded heart. My tears of pain felt like they were pouring from my heart. I did not know where these feet would carry me. Ampel, a place at the corner of Surabaya, was five hours by bus, which I already knew because my sister used to take me there when I was in high school. It was the tomb of the holy man in our religion. At the tomb there were a lot of pilgrims. I mingled with them and did not care about my hunger. I felt that I could breathe a little easier. At this point I was lost in grief. Night changed into the morning, afternoons passed by.

I only drank tap water to overcome hunger. My feet took me to the dock of the sea harbour, Tanjung Perak Surabaya. I walked slowly toward the boat deck to the ferry. I could hardly lift my feet because of the exhaustion. I crossed the straits to the next island near Java; I arrived in a completely strange land. People just looked at me with sorry expressions.

I just walked that afternoon. I felt lost. I walked down an empty dark street and came to a settlement. There was a man who felt sorry for me and decided to help me. He took me to the police station. Then the police called my family to take me back home.

I arrived at home in bad conditions, very unstable. I was taken to the Hospital Kertosono. Based on the advice by my neighbour, I was there for medication.

The doctor did not talk with me, he just prescribed some medicine. I knew and realized what kind of drug the doctor had given me. The drug was an antidepressant. I was thinking that that was not what I wanted at that time, I only needed someone to listen to my pain and story, and all the reasons behind my running away. I needed someone to share the entire burden on my heart. But nobody wanted to talk to me because I was judged as "crazy". They were convinced that I was insane, I was ignored.

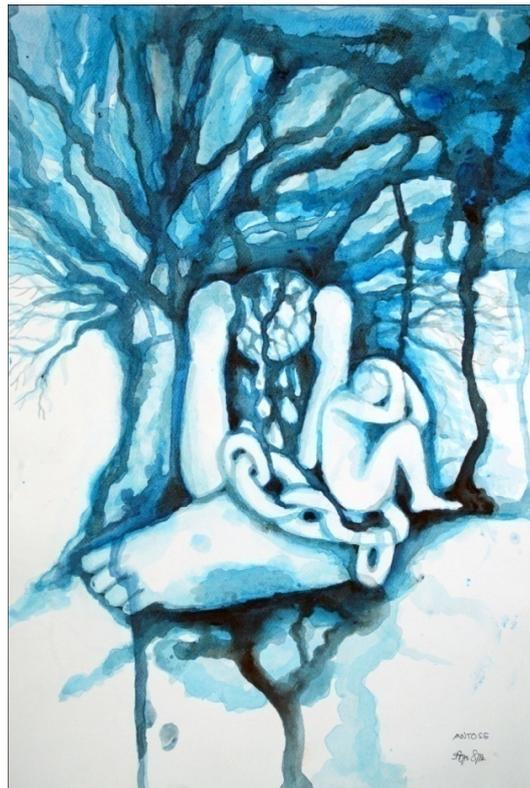
I was really mad when a neighbour, a new nurse, asked me to take my medicine by saying, "Take this, it's a vitamin." She deceived me. I was not that stupid. It was humiliating, I threw the table in front of me, yelling at everyone, "I am not crazy!"

I was enraged, furious and out of control. My neighbour, who was a policeman, put me in handcuffs. Then he put me in jail. I was jailed for about three days. It made my depression worse. With the agreement of my family, I was taken in handcuffs and brought by an ambulance to a psychiatric hospital in Malang (a four-hour bus trip). It shattered my heart.

*"My father, my mother... Can't they think what I feel? No tears can relieve this pain...  
That night was so cold..."*

*"I'm not crazy"*

The next morning I tried to run away, however some nurses captured me again. I managed to run away on the third day, I escaped from the asylum. I hitch-hiked a bus to my town and got back home. My running away was a declaration to not be called "crazy". After reaching home, I was greeted by my mother in tears.



*"Bitter Loneliness"*

This is my journey, my past, when I was in *pasung*. I was alone and felt abandoned. I was desperate and sunk into my adversity. My bitter hurt feelings. I was in the blue of sadness, and never-ending grief enveloped me. I had to face my chains at the same time. Nobody cared about me, I could not reach anyone. Nobody understood how I felt.

My sister's wedding was held three days later. On my sister's wedding day, everything seemed normal, but I felt there was something strange in the eyes of my neighbours. Rumours were still there. I felt insecure. I was still a topic of conversation throughout my village. For example, when my Mum went

to a nearby shop, people were talking about me as when my Mum arrived, everybody went silent right away. Then I was brought to a traditional healer. I was tied to a bed for two weeks. It was painful. I did not feel better at all. I still felt rejected by my community.

### **Second Runaway**

A month after my sister's wedding, the same path and route, I arrived at the same ferry, at the Madura Straits. My wound felt much bigger than before. An enormous burden stuck in my chest. A greater depression attacked me. I ran away without any money, which must have made my parents panic.

I left my village feeling devastated, excluded, like I was not wanted. I don't know why I chose that island to run away to. I just thought it was a place where I could feel peace.

I felt so free when I looked at the blue of the ocean beneath the ship that I got in. Suddenly I walked closer to the edge of the ship. I was ready to jump into the ocean when some people grabbed my back to save me. My mind seemed to be blocked by despair, sadness, anger. It was a blackout moment.

Running with tears in my eyes. People noticed that I had a bad mental condition. I was tied with a big rope to prevent me jumping off the ship. I tried to kill myself by jumping off from the ship. I would have died if the ship's crew had not saved me.

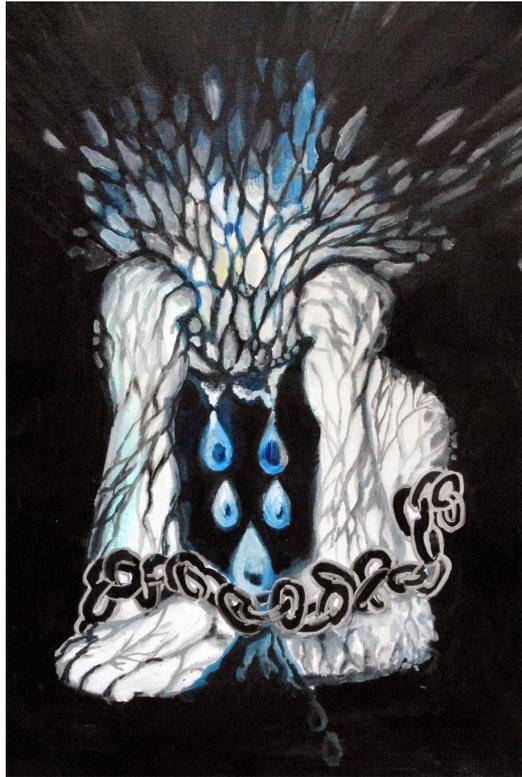
They released me when the ship reached Madura Island. I continued my journey to nowhere. It was another dark long road, under the dark night. Reality tasted so harsh. The shadow of my dark future dragged me down again.



*"Lost in Nowhere"*

With so many burdens in my heart, I was alone in the darkness. Once again, I was stranded in a police station. This time I was picked up by my mother.

I was escorted by a resident in Madura. This time I could still communicate with people, and I could answer all of the questions about where I came from. At last, my parents picked me up.



“Shattered”

I was breaking into pieces. My dignity, my existence, had gone. In Madura Island, I was in prison for two days at a local police station. I was lost, I was losing my mind. I was at the bottom of my life. I remember all those things that happened. And I thank God for it so I can tell my story.

When I got home I tried to run away again, so my parents tied me to the bed. The neighbours came to me and said straight into my face, “You know what, you’re sick, you’re crazy, you should be medicated, put in a rehab! You should feel sorry for your parents!”.

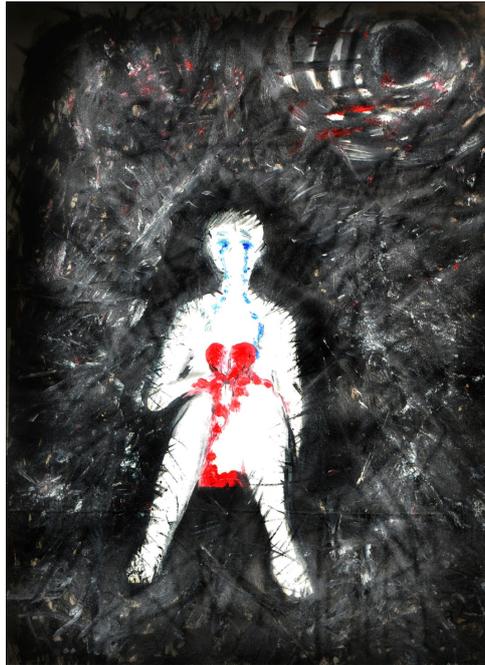
One of my neighbours was sorry to see my mother suffer because of me. She said that I was crazy and tried to make me realize what had happened. “You have a dream that is too high to reach; you do not see the reality of your poor family. Just take a look at your parents, there’s no way to get you into the university, just give up! Wake up! Do not blame your father or mother for being poor. Just take it!”.

This made me feel worthless, unaccepted, rejected (again). I was emotional and unstable, really sick, with a wounded heart. All my neighbours said, “You’re crazy!” While their intentions were good, what they said to me still hurts. They unilaterally judged me and blamed me for having a dream to reach... It was all tangled threads that became very difficult to disentangle.

I was not ready to accept the stigma of being called crazy by my own family. And eventually I was taken to a clinic. My hands were in handcuffs. I don’t know why my neighbour treated me like a criminal, like a crazy person. I was placed in a mental rehabilitation centre. It wasn’t a proper place. It was a community health centre with minimal facilities. This was my first experience in *pasung*. It crushed me even more.

I was chained like an animal, this was the feeling I felt when I was in *pasung*. A doctor interviewed my parents, without questioning me. I was strapped into a bed and had my hands and feet tied. I struggled to escape but it was useless, I was shouting out, my voice echoing everywhere, but no one cared about me. I cursed; swore and many bad words came out of my mouth.

I was finally becoming a crazy man. Just like what they had said about me. I cried, but it was useless. I began to swallow all of it. Even when it was very hard, I managed to accept a little part of the reality that I was crazy. I was released and was back home after being chained for about 28 days.



*“Under the Shadow of Pasung”*

*“I was covered with the black future. Nobody could reach me. I was at my deepest misery. Bleeding heart, I finally wished that it might be better if I had not existed in this world rather than carrying this burden. I cried but nobody heard. I could not sleep when I had just finished this drawing”.*

A month later, my condition worsened. I got tuberculosis, so I was very weak, unhealthy and hopeless. I received therapy for six months for the illness. I was still mentally fragile. I felt like I was finally going to die.

Six months passed by and I underwent a medication program in a health centre. My health returned. The stigma remained; people still treated me like I was crazy. They didn't look at me when we met or were passing by. They ignored me.

Everybody stayed away from me. But some of them still cared for me and treated me like usual. I found out recently it was because my mother had asked them to. I felt that I had to go away. I could not bear my shame. I fell down and I ran away again in 2001.



*“Paralyzed” – suffering and broken. Pasung victims have no future, covered in black shadows of sadness. Hopelessness consumes their mind.*

### **The third runaway**

The third runaway from home was to my relatives' place in another province in West Java. I wanted to go away from my village, I felt uncomfortable there as I wasn't accepted.

My relatives called my family. My family came; they took a train to get there. They took me to the mental institution that chained me before. I was chained again for another 28 days. My family funds were broke because I was sick. They treated me at the traditional healers'; they even borrowed money from everyone and got into debt because of me.

My parents were enraged because of me. Our family name was disgraced, humiliated. They were tired of me. I was mad, mad because of *pasung*. I was angry, because of the uncertain future; I did not know what I should do for living. I felt inferior, with low self-esteem and felt helpless. It was very hard but I finally got used to it. I became numb. But there was resentment in my heart. I wanted to prove to everyone that I'm not crazy like people were saying.

After the third runaway, I started to give up, surrender, I kept silent.

### **Several times in *pasung***

*Pasung* really tortured me. It crushed my feelings, my dignity and my sense of self. In the end, I chose to give up... I resigned.



*"Hurt inside out", the feeling of being chained.*

I experienced trauma because of *pasung*. I degenerated. I was more withdrawn and felt weak. I felt like I didn't have a future anymore. The prisoner's stock crushed me inside out. That was dreadful and painful. My self-concept, my self-esteem ... all were crumbling. I was very embarrassed with the pain of stigma.

I took the medication and gradually reduced the dose. Now I am free from the medicine. I started to look for information about depression and mental illness, reading books and encouraging myself to rise. A few months and years passed. I fell down, arose, went through a process to accept myself and my condition, I fell down and arose again. "I have to get up again," I told myself. I began to work again. I became a tailor. "I have to survive," that's what I thought. But that was not the end of the story.

In 2003, my relative asked me to move in to their place, they promised to get me a job, a new living. It was a good suggestion, so I moved to an island in Sumatra. Three days of traveling on bus. Unfortunately, after a month of waiting, the promise was not realized because of some reason. I was disappointed. I became silent and put myself in a lonely place. My relatives thought that I was possessed by a demon so I was brought to an exorcist. My eyes received traumatic injuries because of it.

Then I was picked up and was back home with my parents. I relapsed and was chained again by my parents for about two weeks. At first I got through the days with a sense of shame, but it didn't last long. My awareness began to emerge. I realized that maybe *pasung* had become part of me. I decided in my heart that I had to get up, and awaken from all of this. I believed God provides trials according to our ability; maybe this was a test from God so I could become a better person.

Little by little I tried to change this pain with being grateful. Being grateful that I'm still alive. Being grateful that I still had a chance to breathe. Being grateful and thankful. I evaluated all the events that had happened. I could start to see my mistakes and my flaws; I finally found that my ego was too big in the past. I tried to motivate myself, I tried to uplift myself and think positively. I did this each day with the support of my family and my friends. I could get up from the adversity.

I tried again with new hope and a new spirit. I understand what my parents did to me, that all of it was basically for my recovery. I forgave those who berated me, those who stigmatized, humiliated and mocked me. What had happened were life experiences.

Forgiveness makes me feel better. I feel calm. And I try to be closer to the Almighty.



*Never again will I let myself blame others for what happened to me, I forgave them all.  
I was crazy... had been crazy... all of it was a fact.*

In 2004 I stopped taking the medication. That was also the doctor's opinion, although he is not a psychiatrist. His name is Dr Fuad, he is a general practitioner. He said to me, "Try this first and we'll see how things develop. If something happens, you can consult with me." I can vent and consult with Dr Fuad now.

Since 2002, I started to arise from adversity. I tried my luck with other activities. I asked one of my relatives, who is a skilful tailor, to teach me how to make clothes, to sew. After a few months I could do it. I earned money from that skill. My zest for life started to return. I wanted to try something new. I want to be a more social person. That's why I signed up for a computer course.

After that I started to apply for jobs, and I was accepted as a cashier in an Internet café. In my free time I was working as a batik salesman. I did whatever I can to be an independent person. I was gaining experience. I joined a sales team marketing optical products, eye-glasses. I worked out of town for about six months.

It's been lucky for me to have a true friend, who really accepts me for who I am. I refer to him as my older brother. I felt like a human being again, someone was still kind to me even though they knew I had been in *pasung*. I felt grateful to know that there's someone who truly cared, stood by me, was there for me to vent until I found myself. We met at a Pesantren (Islamic boarding school) before and we had been together as students. Our friendship continues since we graduated from the boarding school until now. I usually share my problems with him. He accepts me as I am. He is like an older brother, he gives me advice and protects me. He gives me strength and moral support. This is very helpful to me. We're separated now, because he's married and lives in Pekalongan. I often visit him, meet with his mother to ask about his situation, and his mother is a very caring person, as if she were my own

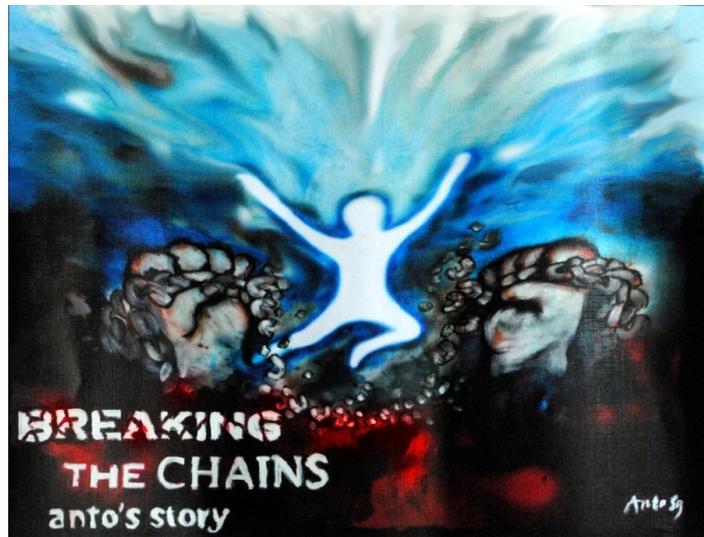
mother. While many people left me behind, thankfully there are friends that still consider me as their friend.

### **The *pasung* on me**

My family was afraid that I would run away from home and get lost. In the end, now that I'm aware of all of this, maybe that was a form of their "love" for me, because of the limited knowledge they have about mental illness and how to deal with it.

I was restrained with rope at first, then chained in a local rehabilitation. Finally my parents put me in chains by themselves at home. I knew that my parents imitated the chaining method they saw when I was in rehab. My parents thought that *pasung* or chains could really tame me. In fact, I was forced to surrender just by allowing myself to obey them. I had no choice, I was tired of everything in my powerless situation.

I could not find a way to get out of those situations. It led me into a deeper depression. It can be said that I was a victim of stigmatization, and that's what led me to be put in *pasung*. But God certainly knows what is best for us. We have to address His trials or blessings.



*New hope finally rose*

It began on 2004. I started to accept everything that happened. How could I survive and get out of those circumstances? First, I forgave everything and myself. I forgave them all, understanding that everything was from my parents' affection.

Second, I realized all the mistakes that I had done, and tried to improve myself for now and the future.



*"Happy Thoughts" – It was when I finally found things that I should be grateful for. I embrace my own life again.*

I forgive and understand that my communities still lack understanding about stigma and mental health. With forgiveness and tolerance, my entire burden will be lifted. So I focus more on having a positive attitude. I create a good atmosphere, an attitude that is more conducive to the things that support my mental health, such as better communication in the family and being more open to each other.

Second, I realized all the mistakes that I had done, and tried to improve myself for now and the future. Third, contemplation, thinking more deeply about life and living. Furthermore, I accept my past and concentrate on my future. I accept all of my abilities, my reality and my limitations. I can explore my own potential as much as possible and use it to create a beautiful future.

I have never been examined by a psychiatrist or psychologist who diagnosed or determined what kind of mental illness I had. I took anti-psychotic drugs from the hospital. The drug was helpful in the recovery at the beginning. It helped me get more peaceful sleep. And finally I was able to reach a clear mind and soul for the recovery. I used my insight to contemplate all my life's experience, and I found a renewed spirit to rise up and fight to survive.

As time goes by, my family communicates better, which has had a good impact on our lives. Although my parents still believe that *pasung* is a good way to treat depression. I don't argue with their opinion. I've managed to eliminate my anger. Slowly but surely, I've gained insight and self-awareness.

Luckily, I have friends and a sister who support me, so my entire burden is relieved. I decided to focus on the positive people in my life. Gathering with family and friends has been good therapy. Time will heal everything; that is very true.

Accepting and making peace with all that happened in my life. It is the time to create a better tomorrow. I imagine life as a circle. It is better to stay in the middle and get the balance. I believe in hope and second chances. I will embrace this life with grateful feelings. What a long road I have been travelled. Thank God for these life lessons.

Nowadays, I always welcome the shining sun, although I know it will be rain today, the rain will stop... the storm will pass. Never give up on hope, always be grateful and feel the spirit!



*"Lights of hope" - I finally see a new hope. I believe that there will be lights after the dark. I am hoping for a better future.*

This is the poem that describes joy after a long time I could meet again with my friend and new friends that accept me for whoever I am. In 2011, I joined an art exhibition in Jakarta organized by KPSI (a support group for people with mental issues), which I joined since 2009. I found many friends who brought my happiness again. I dedicate my poem to all of my friends.

*"There's Still Hope"*

*I found my hope, again,  
there is light at the end of my journey.  
I now have an optimistic mind.  
I passed through my storm. I got stronger than before.*

*Oh, smile in my mind  
Where were you gone  
Somehow I found that the feelings...  
Have gone away*

*The feelings of you and me  
Through my years you have been gone  
And carried my smile away,  
Me alone living in tears every day*

*I do not know why... oh, I do not know why.  
Gone for several years has made me cry  
But yesterday for sure...  
I have been told that you're coming back*

*Yeah coming back home... again... for me  
Yeeha I cried out loud to see  
A noble friend has brought you back to me...  
And I made promises to hold on and stay with me  
No matter what it is going to be  
Together forever is what we will be*

In September 2012, there was an unexpected moment in my life. My parents put me in *pasung* again for about three days. It began with an event right after I was interviewed by a television program in Indonesia to share my *pasung* experience. I got overexcited, I was overwhelmed by the feeling and I wanted to share it with my friends. Unfortunately I was in an accident; I crashed my scooter with another motorcycle on the street. I was injured, but did not tell my parents about it when I got home.

It was not an easy condition, I was shocked by what had happened and I could not sleep that night, so I went out for some air at an Internet café near my home. My parents judged that I had relapsed; they yelled at me and restrained me to stay at home. My mother was worried about me, she was afraid that I would run away again. So I was chained again for three days.

I felt so sad but I decided to be strong. I said to myself, "Oh my God, not again." But I will solve this smoothly. I just did what my mother wanted me to do; I just obeyed them and didn't argue. It was hard but thanks to God I did it. I felt very sad because at that time I was meant to go to my campus to attend lessons, as I was able to register in a local college.

My neighbour said that I should not go to campus because he thought that I was "crazy", it would make me more "crazy" if I got my education. One of them was going to report it to my campus so they would expel me. My sister backed me up and it did not happen. I kept my emotions under control. I just focused on my positive mind's behaviour. I believed in myself, that I will survive this all again. I had survived the worst so I will win over this. A month after these bad events I sat with my mom and father to talk about it. I asked about their explanation, why they did it again. We talked and they said they were sorry for what happened. They were just over-worried and that made them do what they did to me. Lack of knowledge by my parents, family and community about how to manage the stress I was experiencing was also a main reason for my mistreatment. I forgave them. I have committed to love my parents for whom they are.

Now, I am an English student, I am at the fullest of myself. My dean and lecturer know about my past and they just treat me with respect. I have many wonderful friends in campus, and they appreciate me as well. I could not ask for more, I just feel grateful about everything. Going for a lesson in campus is a refreshing moment. I enjoy every second of it. I have learned so many lessons. What a life journey. I survived, once again.

In April 2014 I was in my second year in my education. I was unwell, once again. I had my *pasung* for several days. My mother just became worried about my safety, if I would runaway or anything bad would happen to me. So it [*pasung*] became a routine. My mom could not change her opinion about *pasung*. She really believed that *pasung* is the only way she had to solve the situation. I had to get used to the chains again though I was disappointed by her decision to put me in chain (again). I had the same treatment just like in the past. But, this time, I tried to understand and reframe it, look into her perspective. My parents did this because they care about me. It lasted about three weeks; I did not go to the campus. My mind was pressured by my situation. I was worried that I would lose the English lessons. I was scared that I would fail my education. At the last *pasung*, I was freed by a psychiatrist (Dr Marga) from the group that I joined (KPSI), which is concerned with mental health issues. When my friends at the group heard that I was in *pasung* again, they did their best way to help me. Dr Marga sent her fellow doctors who lived nearby to visit me and persuade my parents to open my *pasung*. It was a hard argument between the doctors and my mothers. My mom insisted that I had to be chained until she was convinced that I was healthy enough for the daily life. I also got my medication. Right after being released, I prepared myself to quickly adapt to the situation. There was no time for grieving, mourning, or even crying. I held myself from standing still and moved on. I grabbed as much of the spirit of optimism I could within me. I am not blaming my mom or my family. I must understand my parents. They are also tired with my *pasung* events. My mom burned all the paintings that I did about my *pasung* story. She just could not take all the dark memories about *pasung*. As for me, *pasung* or chains is horrifying, traumatizing and full of pain.

Thankfully, I had all my hopes in me. Those hopes made me stronger every day.

My experience made me decide that I must do something about *pasung*. I've had enough with *pasung*! It made me sick. I have to stop this. I do not want my fellow humans to experience *pasung*. Chains do not cure people with mental illness. Some of my neighbours are still in *pasung* because of their illness; I want to change this situation by doing something about it.

I realize that it is impossible for me to walk alone. It takes a lot of elements to make a change. I joined a community for mental health support in Jakarta since 2010. I have been supporting others who struggled with depression through that community. I committed myself to be active in a community

about mental health awareness. I want to speak to the world and campaign for everyone to be free from *pasung*.



*"Eternal Freedom"*

I dedicate this picture to the *pasung* victims in Cianjur who recently died [see the documentary *Breaking the Chains, Note 1*]. They died finally, freed at last. May God give them a beautiful place in heaven. I saw many *pasung* cases in my country. People often die because of *pasung*. Mental health patients carry extra misery, extra pain because of *pasung*. I hope that this world will be free from *pasung* practices. I wish to do something for others. Breaking the stigma and... NO MORE CHAINS!



*"Pasung behind our eyes"*

*What should we do to stop this practice?  
They are humans and should be respected and receive decent treatment.*

### **A New Meaning**

*Day by day passes  
Choice by choice  
I know I had to survive  
it's about learning to live*

*I choose to be free  
I choose to survive  
I choose to forgive  
I choose to rise*

*Once again  
I embrace this life*

*A life full of possibilities  
A life with an new meaning*

I have chosen to survive. It means that no matter what happened, I will struggle to find a better tomorrow. I believe that my *pasung* experiences have a meaning in my life. God must have a message for giving me those experiences. It is just a path that I had to go through. It must have made me stronger every day. That is why I am here and able to share this life story for the world and humanity. Now is December 2014, I am in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year at my campus. I try to pursue my degree in English. I am also still active in the group for mental health. The important thing is, I do love my mom and my family. My relationship with my parents is great. I am grateful that I have so many friends who support and accept me for what I am. Lastly, I hope that soon I would be able to support my parents, ease all the burden and pain. Replace the dark memories with colourful love and a beautiful life.

*Anto Sg.*



**CONCLUSIONS** *Pasung* and other degrading or harmful treatment of people with mental health issues such as those experienced by Anto, have been identified by Indonesian and international authors (Drew *et al*, 2011; Irmansyah *et al*, 2009; Kirmayer, 2012) as breaching national as well as universal constitutions and legislations. Examples are the 1945 Indonesian Constitution, the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its Convention on the Rights of People with Disability, which is now legally binding. As testified by Anto himself and by the death of three of the people filmed in “Breaking the chains”, the mental and physical consequences of these conditions are profound.

It has been reported that at least 57,000 people with mental health problems have been restrained and/or confined in Indonesia only (Ministry of Health and National Institute of Health Research and Development, 2014). Given that the prevalence of mental illness in this nation of 229 million people is high (estimated at 11% for the entire country), the use of *pasung* seems unlikely to subside without intensive education campaigns and community-based initiatives. Such activities are both time and resource intensive, thus substantial new investments in mental health are essential. Despite the protections available in laws and, in some instances, a human rights’ infrastructure, violations of the rights of people with mental health problems remains widespread, and largely unnoticed and unabated, in Indonesia and in many other countries (Irmansyah *et al*, 2009; Drew *et al*, 2011). Nevertheless, the *Aceh Bebas Pasung* and *Indonesia Bebas Pasung* programs represent “important mental health and human rights initiative[s] that can serve to inform similar efforts in other parts of Indonesia and other low and middle-income countries where restraint and confinement of the mentally ill is receiving insufficient attention” (Puteh *et al*, 2011). As argued by Minas (who is actively involved in the

*Bebas Pasung* programs), “the prevalent culture of silence in the face of flagrant and persistent abuse and neglect of the rights of people with mental illness is a major contributor to the current state of affairs and must be changed. Such silence results in a continuing failure to deal with a profound human rights problem and, on moral and legal grounds, cannot be tolerated.” (Minas, 2009, p. 2).

It was May 2012 when the I (Colucci) did her field/filmwork with Anto. My idea was to document, by means of film and photography, a retrospective personal account of a young man who had lived experience of chaining and isolation because of his mental health condition. I was interested to research how he made sense of *pasung*, what was his understanding of the reasons why his family and close community chained him in a number of instances, including using handcuffs from his policeman uncle, how *pasung* changed his feelings and constructions about himself, his past, present and future, and the people close to him. Little I knew that *pasung* was not in the past but was, on the contrary, still Anto’s present and that he would be chained again twice only shortly after my departure. Thankfully this time it was only for a short period, when he was unwell and the family became concerned about his safety.

All paintings in this manuscript are original artworks by Anto. Sadly, this manuscript is the last trace of them as, because of their content about *pasung*, all the original paintings were destroyed by his family during one of the instances when Anto was being held in chains. After these episodes, Anto has mainly been free but at times he is chained for a few days, and when this occurs he is very concerned about missing his English classes!

Personal stories of ‘*pasung* survivors’ such as Anto’s, powerfully contribute to understanding the devastating impact that *pasung* has on the person and their families and act as a powerful advocacy tool for the elimination of these practices, in Indonesia and in the many other countries where various forms of restraints and confinements still occur, including the so-called ‘developed countries’.

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## NOTE

1. Excerpts from the film can be viewed in the website <http://movie-ment.org/breakingthechains>

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