Journal with Nicholas

by Satya Limanta

Lukas: A Novella Revealing Low Socioeconomic Condition as a Risk Factor of Schizophrenia

Nicholas Valentino Handoko[1], Liem Satya Limanta[2]
English Department, Faculty of Humanities and Creative Industries, Petra Christian University,
Siwalankerto 121-131, Surabaya 60236, INDONESIA
E-mail: a11180011@john.petra.ac.id[1], satya@petra.ac.id[2]

ABSTRACT
Recent world crises have caused millions to relocate. However, upon reaching their destination, immigrants often suffer from mental health problems. This work addresses how an immigrant status increases one's likelihood to develop the early symptoms of schizophrenia and how to recover. It does so by using Blair Wheaton's theory of the sociogenesis of psychological disorder and a phenomenological and participatory research written by Larry Davidson and his colleagues. It warrants a publication of the phenomenon in a creative form. This novella explores the perspective of Lukas Bertram, a wanted politician who left Earth for the planet of Morael, where he would try to survive amidst discrimination, give up, succumb to schizophrenia, and eventually recover. According to the findings, Lukas' fatalism became the mediating variable between low socioeconomic status and his initial development of schizophrenia. Overcoming fatalism by reestablishing social connection and sense of control, thus, sparked his recovery process.

Keywords: low socioeconomic status; fatalism; schizophrenia; novella

INTRODUCTION

The Rohingya genocide and Afghanistan's Taliban-led takeover are only two of the many crises which left millions of people stunned because they are forced to leave not only their houses and possessions but also their country altogether. Some, like the 90 Rohingya refugees, had faced rejection from attempting to land in India and Bangladesh before touching land on Idaman Island, East Aceh, after sailing for more than a hundred days earlier this year (Paul, 2021). Further West, around 2.5 million registered Afghan refugees have already been displaced from their country of origin, 2.2 million of which now reside in Iran and Pakistan alone (Loft, 2021). Even more recently, in the last quarter of 2021, we see Middle Eastern immigrants fleeing their home country to get to the European Union through the dictator-led Belarus, whose leader encourages people to cross the border, even to shove them through their Western border towards the armed forces of the Union.

However, leaving one's country of origin and escaping persecution are not the only obstacles that the immigrants face. Unfortunately for them, reintegration to their new lives in a new environment proves to be just as challenging. Studies have shown that immigrants as well as ethnic minorities, who have an increased chance of having inferior social status, are more likely to develop schizophrenia (van der Ven & Selten, 2018). Furthermore, lower economic status caused by the loss of a job adds more stress which, coupled with the lack of coping efforts, will result in fatalism and heightened risk of said disorder (Wheaton, 1980). The severity of the increased risk has even been recorded to be 5 to 10 times higher according to a paper studying African-Caribbean communities in Europe (Fung et al., 2009). Thus, considering the significance of the refugees and immigrants' mental health problems as well as their relevance in the current world situation, we have decided to take up the issue of immigrant status and its relation to schizophrenia as the topic of this creative work, whose protagonist, Lukas, resembles the aforementioned refugees—driven out of their home because of a political uprising and exposed to a heightened risk of schizophrenia.

According to The National Institute of Mental Health (2020), schizophrenia is a "mental illness that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves" (para. 1). Schizophrenia has three categories of symptoms: psychotic, negative, and cognitive. Psychotic symptoms include those which only appear in schizophrenic patients. They are symptoms that cannot be found in people free of schizophrenia. Psychotic symptoms include hallucination, delusion, and disorganized speech among several others. In contrast, negative symptoms are those that involve the reduction or loss of normal processes. These symptoms include reduced motivation, diminished feelings of pleasure, 'flat affect' or the inability to show emotion, and thought disorder. Lastly, there are the cognitive symptoms, which are related to problems in "attention, concentration, and memory" (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). Difficulty in processing information and using said information as well as trouble focusing are all symptoms that fall under this category.

Furthermore, regarding the creative work which we will write, we have decided to create a psychological thriller novella with a sci-fi setting. According to Wendy Burt-Thomas (2010, The Short Story chapter, para. 2), the novella is "usually thought of as a longer short story or a short novel and can range from 5,000 to more than 40,000 words." For this creative thesis purpose, a novella is a work of prose fiction that is between 12,000 to 15,000 words long. This creative form is selected because its length allows us to write in sufficient detail about the world that the protagonist will inhabit on top of the story itself. Aside from the length, a novella is suitable for us because of prior practices in prose-writing. It is our most familiar format, triumphant over play and screenplay in that regard. Indeed, Wendy Burt-Thomas suggested that in choosing a creative format, "[w]rite what you know, in a format you're familiar with" (Burt-Thomas, 2010). Furthermore, novels and novellas are better suited for cerebral stories than other formats. In comparing screenplays and novels, Burt-Thomas (2010, The Screenplay chapter, para. 3) wrote, "[e]very screenplay doesn't need a hold-on-to-your-seat car chase or a battle scene or a baby being born, but it does need some movement and some points of visual interest. The novel might be a better choice for an inner-directed plot." This property is also possessed by novellas and short stories as they are both works of prose whose difference only lies in their length. Indeed, Burt-Thomas concurs by continuing with "and the short story or the short movie [is] the right pick for an idea with a smaller scope." This means that we can capitalize on narration, our best suited writing style. Plays and screenplays, on the other hand, avoid narration to describe the settings of the story. Moreover, although authors often divide their stories into chapters, novels and novellas are more lenient in terms of their format. Meanwhile, plays and screenplays are structured in three acts (Burt-Thomas, 2010).

The psychological thriller genre is chosen for its focus on the inner workings of the human mind. However, the baffling revelation of the mind's capabilities and/or vulnerabilities often leaves readers wondering if they truly comprehend it. It is "a self-conflicted genre with a central dialectic: we can understand the mind—we can't understand the mind. In both cases, the mind reveals itself to be almost unspeakable" (Mecholsky & Hoppenstand, 2014). In having a mentally troubled protagonist, who will develop schizophrenic symptoms, we will also have the option to utilize an unreliable narrator, who functions as a trope of the genre used in influential works like *Gone Girl* (2012) by Gillian Flynn. Moreover, the sci-fi genre is selected because of our fascination with its pseudo-scientific elements. It allows us to create hitherto nonexistent norms, values, and rituals for this new world, one whose culture is not shared with any readers, making them feel just as lost as the protagonist. An example of a novel which utilizes the combination of these two genres, sci-fi and psychological thriller, and inspires us is *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) by Anthony Burgess. Some other works that inspired us, albeit presented in the form of a film, include *Passengers* (2016), directed by Morten Tyldum, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), directed by Michel Gondry. These three works drive us to create a unique storyline while maintaining the recurring tropes of the two genres.

The novella in this creative thesis follows the story of a man forced to leave his nation in fear of an underground uprising in his nation. His choice of destination is a space colony requiring a near-century-long journey in cryostasis, which is a freezing tube that preserves life. When he reaches it, he finds that adapting to a society both temporally and spatially distant from his origin is challenging. After being the subject of ridicule and economic hardships, he resigns himself to a slow death. However, he realizes that his life might be snuffed out by someone else. Voices and silhouettes of an assassin from his old nation begin cropping up. However, he will later realize that these are only his hallucinations.

The theories used to explain the processes taking place in the novella are Blair Wheaton's attributional theory of the sociogenesis of psychological disorder as well as Larry Davidson and his colleague's phenomenological and participatory research. The former, the attributional theory of the sociogenesis of psychological disorder, attempts to make explicit "the process by which social factors may affect the development of disorder" (Wheaton, 1980) so that social causation explanations for psychological disorder may be considered as valid. It states that the inverse relationship between socioeconomic status, often abbreviated into SES, and psychological disorder exists. This means that the lower one's socioeconomic status is, the higher the chance for someone to develop a psychological disorder. However, the covariance between SES and the likelihood of the development of a psychological disorder does not explain the process of how the former results in the latter. For this, Wheaton hypothesized that the mediating variable between the two is fatalism, which is "a predisposition to interpret the external environment as having high causal power while person forces are felt to be minimal" (Wheaton, 1980).

Although a logical attribution should be determined by three factors, which are consensus, consistency, and distinctiveness (Kelley, 1967), people tend to act in ego-defensive or ego-enhancing ways instead. In an experimental study by Luginbuhl and Crowe (1975), it is discovered that external attribution is more common in unsuccessful subjects rather than the successful ones. This act proves to be a double-edged sword in that it helps avoid self-blame but also undermines the perceived self-capability.

Furthermore, now that a fatalistic tendency is present in a person, it lowers the coping effort of the victim. This lack of effort, and not the inability to, is one of the primary reasons why disorders blossom. In Wheaton's words, "[t]here are a number of mechanisms by which fatalism may inhibit adaptation potential. The most important mechanism is via a reduction in coping effort: Fatalism makes the point of coping behavior appear ambiguous, since there is an assumption that attempts at control will have a low probability of effectiveness" (Wheaton, 1980, p. 107).

Moreover, there is a need to delineate the details of schizophrenia, from its definition, symptoms, and diagnosis. To begin with, schizophrenia is defined as a "mental illness that affects how a person thinks, feels, and behaves" (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). These effects fall under three types of symptom categories, which are psychotic, negative, and cognitive. Psychotic symptoms include delusions, hallucinations, disorganized speech, and catatonia. Next, negative symptoms are concerned with the reduction of normal processes. It consists of reduced motivation, diminished feeling of pleasure, flat affect, and thought disorder. Lastly, cognitive symptoms are related to problems in "attention, concentration, and memory" (The National Institute of Mental Health, 2020). These symptoms impair a patient's capability to process and use information. As written in DSM-5, a person may be diagnosed with schizophrenia if two conditions are met. First, the effect of its symptoms is observable for six months. Secondly, there must exist a one-month period of active phase symptoms or psychosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Moreover, to complement this theory, research proposing a solution for the recovery of schizophrenia is provided. The title of this research paper is 'Phenomenological and Participatory Research on Schizophrenia: Recovering the Person in Theory and Practice' (1997) by Larry Davidson, David A. Stayner, Stacey Lambert, Peter Smith, and William H. Sledge. Their research focuses on the recidivism, which is defined as the recurring hospitalization of a patient that happened at least twice in the same year, of schizophrenic patients. This recidivism is attributed to three causes, which are impoverished social life, fatalism, and disconnection from treatment (Davidson et al., 1997). Firstly, re-hospitalized patients had poor social quality. This is due to their fondness of isolating themselves. Some stated their affinity towards the hospital setting for its privacy. They believed that being re-hospitalized was "like hiding away" (Davidson et al., 1997) from the society, where they had a worse chance at living. Secondly, the researchers noticed the presence of fatalism. When the patients were asked with a question regarding attempts to recover from their illness, researchers were met with overwhelming resignation. One answered that she could only take her medicine and pray. Lastly, there was a disconnection between the patients and mental health services. This means that the patients did not see the importance of mental health services. Many patients stated their obliviousness to their conditions. They also did not see the merit of hospitals being a place for recovery. Patients compared it to a school where they would be evaluated and once they did well enough and discharged from it, people would be happy for them.

Thus, the researchers proposed amendments to the way schizophrenic patients are treated according to these three points. They did so by instating a community integration program where patients were given the chance to restore their quality of life and make the hospital a less appealing alternative. Patients were brought to social outings outside of the hospital. This directly tackles the first factor contributing to recidivism, which is poor social life. Furthermore, researchers gave patients the authority to choose the location for their social outing as well as the lunch they would have there, which gave them a level of mastery over their situation and a sense of agency. This addressed the problem of fatalism. Lastly, after the 3-month period for this program ended, researchers also observed that the patients saw an increase in the importance of treatment. Patients voiced their concern regarding the possibility of losing all of the progress they had made during the community integration program period, and rallied to arrange future outings themselves. After three more months had elapsed, the result of the community integration program was revealed. When compared to patients with similar number of readmissions and days spent in the hospital prior to the index admission, the 15 first patients to participate in the program saw a reduction in readmission by nearly 70% and the amount of days spent in the hospital was reduced by over 90%.

In the work, the readers will see the protagonist, Lukas, be subjected to a low socioeconomic status in the space colony. This is because of his absence from the world for the last century. Most notable perhaps is his century-late education, which causes him to struggle to find a decent job. On the more social side, he is disconnected from the rest of society because of his spatial and temporal distance. The people he meets talk differently, show little to no warmth, dress differently, and are all physically shorter, which makes him stand out. Later on, he becomes the target of a racial slur as well. The despondency allows fatalistic thoughts to grow. He resigned himself in his apartment, waiting for his end to come, marking the advent of his fatalism. From there, his schizophrenia symptoms cropped up. He hallucinated double blood moons and auditory senses such as the pitter patter of varmints. As a part of his delusion, he believed that he was being wiretapped and that the people in the television were talking to him. He also had bouts of catatonia, during which he does not move. Attempting to recover, Lukas contacts Angelo, the employment agent, to assure that he is coming to his last scheduled interview. After being rejected by the interviewer, he decides to keep going with the job application process but makes a significant change, which is deciding which job interviews he wishes to pursue instead of leaving it up to Angelo. Furthermore, Lukas reconnects with Matteo Ermes, whom he

previously met in the rehabilitation center and shares the same fate. Matteo offers Lukas to stay at a house that six Bargrefinians bought together, to which Lukas accepts. This establishes a support network for Lukas, which causes his last few remaining symptoms of schizophrenia to disappear.

CONCEPT OF THE CREATIVE WORK

Theme

The theme of this creative work is about how resignation to one's presently harsh condition will only exacerbate the issue. Only by facing it head on will a person be able to overcome it. This will be made apparent by the conflict of the story and how it is resolved when Lukas finally plays an active role in his recovery.

Character(s):

- Lukas Bertram, 36 years old in terms of Earth calendar
  Lukas left everything behind. He was a politician in Bargrefin before he fled the nation during a revolt. He had brown eyes, short and straight black hair, medium height, and no distinguishing feature at all aside from his overwhelming plainness and the typical saggy eye bag of a person who could not catch a break. Despite that, he still has the friendly demeanor of a typical Bargrefinian. He would smile and nod when greeting people. He would say 'excuse i' too frequently if he was not self-aware about it. The hardships he endured in Morael, however, led him to grow more cynical. He develops a false view that every Moraelian he met was rude, which is why he was surprised when he saw Angelo smile for the first time at the end of the story, diminishing his preconceived notion somewhat. We plan on showing the effect of low socioeconomic status and fatalism on a person through Lukas. Readers will be able to see it in how Lukas suffered ridicule, unjust payroll, and other hardships which led him to do small acts of fatalism throughout the story and ultimately resulted in his resignation to die in his apartment. It is also observable in the story that overcoming fatalism, in Lukas' case by going to his last scheduled interview and scheduling more despite having failed, and building a support network can spark the recovery from schizophrenia.

- Angelo Yolotzin, roughly 35 years old in terms of Earth calendar
  Angelo was a stellar employee of his agency. He could keep things professional while still imparting a personal flair of his and building a genuine connection. In contrast to Lukas, he was a fresh and spirited young soul. He is enthusiastic, sentimental, and caring. He would risk his name in front of the companies who paid him to find an employee just to give Lukas a chance. Despite that, he never really shows this kindness through facial expressions, much like other Moraelians.

- Matteo Ermes, in his 50s in terms of Earth calendar
  He is another Bargrefinian who arrived in Morael with Lukas. He was inquisitive and perceptive. He noticed Lukas' strange behavior of meeting everyone on board of the ship that carried them to the new planet. He became Lukas' presumed pursuer throughout the story, which is only disproven at the end of the story, where the kindly Matteo offered Lukas to stay with his fellow Bargrefinians in a house they bought together.

Plot

The story starts by giving us an exposition of Lukas' background. An insurgent group of rebels threatens to overthrow the government of Bargrefin. In realizing they are losing the war, the people in power try to flee the nation, leaving the country in disarray. Lukas is one of them. The hiding place of his choice is a space colony lightyears away.

He spends a couple of months having to stay at a rehabilitation center. Muscle atrophy, resulting from the lack of movement, causes him to feel weak. His choice of destination also does not help. Morael, the planet he journeys to, has a stronger gravitational force which his body is not accustomed to. Worst of all, however, is the disconnect from society, which marks the rising action. Being spatially and temporally distant to Lukas's home planet, the people of Morael develop a number of new words and abandon others.

After pulling through the arduous rehabilitation while failing to identify his pursuer, Lukas rents an apartment with the valuables he can carry from Earth. He hires an employment agency and meets Angelo, who does his best to arrange interviews for Lukas. After being insulted with a racial slur, given the cold shoulder, and having to scrap by with barely enough money, Lukas cannot handle the last blow delivered by his interviewer who only offers him a measly minimum wage despite his stellar performance. Thus, he isolates himself in his apartment.

Back in his shabby apartment, hallucinations taking the form of a pursuer from his previous life manifests. After being pushed into madness in this climax, he tries to flee once more, but he realizes he has no place where he belongs. That was unless he can make one himself. At this point, Lukas has had enough of being played around by fate. He no longer wishes to play a passive role in his own life. He calls Angelo to confirm his attendance for the last interview Angelo has scheduled for him. Despite failing to be hired, Lukas is determined to regain control over his life. He does so by keeping in contact with Angelo until he gets a job as a salesman, which coincidentally causes Lukas to reconnect with Matteo and five other Bargrefinians. This marked the falling action and resolution portion of the story.

Conflict

This creative work pits its protagonist against two types of conflicts—character conflict and plot conflict. Character conflicts are internal in nature, while plot conflicts are external. One commonly exists in the presence of the other. Their causation and resolution are explained by Writer's Digest Editors (2011) as so, "[i]nternal character conflicts are emotional problems brought about by *external* conflicts that make a character reluctant to achieve a goal because of her own roadblocks" and that "[i]n fiction, character conflicts are why plot conflicts can't be resolved." To put it more simply, the external conflict within a story sparks its internal counterpart. This causes the protagonist to have to work backward and resolve his/her internal conflict first before the root of the problem—the external conflict. This interaction between the two types of conflict can be found in my story. The external conflict stems from the low socioeconomic condition Lukas is subjected to by the new environment he finds himself in. It is caused by the differences between Lukas and the members of the society he lives with. It causes the internal conflict to arise within Lukas. It takes the form of his fatalism. Furthermore, Lukas will not be able to progress towards escaping his low socioeconomic status before he defeats this fatalistic mindset.

CONCLUSION

Lukas' hard-fought survival on planet Morael shows how an immigrant status can lead to the development of schizophrenia. The process begins with the low socioeconomic status one has to endure. To name some examples of the form in which low socioeconomic hardship manifests, they are the fortune one has to leave behind, having to start one's career over with minimum wage, distrust from locals and even flat out insults. It is observable in the story that Lukas endures these hurdles. In chapter 2, it is revealed that most of his belongings back on Earth went unsold. In chapter 3, Lukas was only offered minimum wage despite his prowess in handling the interview. Throughout the story, Lukas also had to bear with the unfriendly attitude of most Moraelians, like the one shown by the staff behind the front desk of the rehabilitation center or the insulting slang for Earthlings—dirtlings.

Low socioeconomic status by itself is not capable of increasing the likelihood of a person developing schizophrenia, however—it needs to be accompanied with a fatalistic attitude, which *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2002) defines as "an attitude of resignation in the face of some future event or events which are thought to be inevitable." The readers can see this taking place when Lukas bolts out of the first interview at the end of chapter 3 and decides against coming to his second interview in the beginning of chapter 4. Not only that, but he also decided to stay cooped up in his apartment until the end would come for him.

The combination of these two factors, which are low socioeconomic status and fatalism, results in the heightened risk of developing schizophrenia. In chapter 4 of the story, Lukas began to show symptoms of schizophrenia. It started with hallucinating auditory sensations in the form of whispering outside of his room. Then, he also showed another psychotic symptom, which was delusion. He thought he was being wiretapped and that the televised Moraelians were talking to him. During the climax, his sense of vision was also affected. He hallucinated the blood moons and the black mass thought to be his pursuer. In the end, in chapter 5, he was still suffering from a cognitive symptom, which was a hindrance in the recollection of memories, as well as a motor control problem in the form of catatonia.

Only after the decision to regain control over one's life is made will one begin recovering from schizophrenia. This is observable through Lukas' decision to finally leave his apartment to attend his third interview, persevere even after his interviewer's rejection, and pick an interview on his own. The healing process begins right there and then. He starts acknowledging his own spent effort. His psychotic symptoms do not return, even if he still has trouble remembering the night of the accident as well as catatonia. It is also important to note that this happened before he finally receives his first paycheck and survives his economic hardship. This shows that, indeed, the lack of coping effort caused by fatalism, not the incapability to, is what causes the development of schizophrenia. Earlier in the story, when Lukas passed the interview and training in his first interview spot, this phenomenon can also be seen. He was capable of being employed and rising through the ranks quickly, but the mounting frustration made him quit, which sparked his psychological disorder. Lastly, after securing a social network as seen in the final chapter, Lukas manages to eliminate the remaining symptom, which is catatonia, and his ungrounded fear of a pursuer.

REFERENCES

American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed.). https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425596

Burt-Thomas, W. (2010). *The everything creative writing book*. Adams Media.

Davidson, L., Stayner, D. A., Lambert, S., Smith, P., & Sledge, W. H. (1997). Phenomenological and participatory research on schizophrenia: recovering the person in theory and practice. *Journal of Social Issues*, *53*(4), 767–784. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1997.tb02460.x

Friedman, S. (2009). (thesis). *Language as a familiar alien in science fiction or, as Riddley Walker would ask, wie wood eye both err two reed this?* Retrieved April 4, 2022, from https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/63996/friedman_starr_2009.pdf;sequence=1.

Fung, W. L., Bhugra, D., & Jones, P. B. (2009). Ethnicity and mental health: The example of schizophrenia and related psychoses in migrant populations in the western world. *Psychiatry*, *8*(9), 335–341. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mppsy.2009.06.002
Mecholsky, K. (2014). The Psychological Thriller: An Overview. In G. Hoppenstand (Ed.), *The American Thriller* (pp. 48–70). essay, Salem Press.

Kelley, H. H. (1967). Attribution theory in social psychology. In D. Levine (ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (Volume 15, pp. 192-238). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

LiteraryDevices Editors. (2021). Novella. https://literarydevices.net/novella/

Loft, P. (2021, September 12). *Afghanistan: Refugees and displaced people in 2021*. House of
      Commons Library. https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9296/.

Luginbuhl, J. E., Crowe, D. H., & Kahan, J. P. (1975). Causal attributions for success and
      failure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *31*(1), 86–93.
      https://doi.org/10.1037/h0076172

Paul, R. (2021, June 7). *Rohingya refugee boat lands in Indonesia after 113-day voyage*.
      Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/rohingya-refugee-boat-lands-
      indonesia-after-113-day-voyage-2021-06-04/.

Rice, & Hugh. (2002). Fatalism. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
      (Winter 2018). Stanford University, Metaphysics Research Lab.

The National Institute of Mental Health. (2020, May). *Schizophrenia*. National Institute of
      Mental Health. https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/schizophrenia

van der Ven, E., & Selten, J.-P. (2018). Migrant and ethnic minority status as risk indicators for
      schizophrenia. *Current Opinion in Psychiatry*, *31*(3), 231–236.
      https://doi.org/10.1097/yco.0000000000000405

Wheaton, B. (1980). The sociogenesis of psychological disorder: An attributional theory.
      Journal of Health and Social Behavior, *21*(2), 100. https://doi.org/10.2307/2136730

Writer's Digest Editors. (2011). *Crafting novels & short stories: The complete guide to writing
      great fiction*. Writer's Digest Books.

Journal with Nicholas