Love in the Time of Leprosy

Geographies of intimate citizenship in Cirebon, Indonesia

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The life after death of José and Magdalena Ramirez

By John Nova Lomax Wednesday, Jul 29 2009

Everybody thought college would be a breeze for José Ramirez. A starter on his high school football team, he was voted most popular in his senior class of 1966, and he had a pretty girlfriend named Magdalena Santos, who was voted second-most popular in her class. In addition to his athletic and social prowess, he was no slouch in the classroom either. He won a scholarship to Laredo Junior College, as did Magdalena.

Their parents had come up far in the world, but Magdalena and José wanted to go them one better by getting an education and then seeing what they could do from there.

The only worry was that back when he was a tenth grader, José started to get sick. At first it seemed a mere nuisance, if a strange one. Beginning in his sophomore year, odd little lesions that resembled pimples started appearing on his legs and hands. He lost...
People Affected by Leprosy (PALs)

PAL

Interventions

Stigma

Treatment

Erradication
Nature of marriage – (Stanley et.al. 2001:84)

• 91.30% arranged marriages
• 8.70% love marriages
Intimate citizenship

Evans
Rationality in order to recover the traditional understanding of love

Roseneil
New forms of love that tell more about friendship and care
The tradition of love

• Love – Marriage
• Love – Monogamy
• Love – Heterosexuality
• Love – Sex
• Love – Age
• Love – Able body
Personal narratives

Accentuate the demand to decentralise analysis of leprosy from the ‘disease’ and to interrogate daily lives
Pak Wisnu

“Do you think that she loved you? Love?... I do not know about that. I just know that the day she left she took my house, my children and my life with her”

“People who have leprosy should have the right to have a partner, to get married but over all to have financial stability. Should a partner offer you that?”

- 68 years old/30 years of marriage
- Abandoned by his wife and two children
- Lives in a tent near the river
- Works bringing stones from the river
- The community sometimes helps him
Pak Kasnadi

“I had two wives. I was living that situation for about four years. I loved them both. However, my second wife was also rich so I was interested in her thinking of the future of my family. I asked my first wife to be understandable because I loved her too. I think she did understand and she did not have problems with that”

- 65 years old (+)
- Married for about 37 years
- 10 children
- His wife and daughter had leprosy too
- Had two wives sentimental and financial reasons
- Love is about caring, cooking, working, bringing money
Ibu Aswati

“After being rejected his parents said to him “don’t be hopeless”. He is supported by his parents. So when he asked me to marry him, he told me his entire story on how he has always been rejected when proposing to a girl. So, he doesn’t keep any secret. ..Finally, I feel pity for him (laughs) and I said yes. But there was not love at the beginning. How you can love somebody who you do not know well.”

- Married for about 18 years/3 children
- The husband lives in Kalimantan
- Visits the family only one or two times a year (1-2 weeks)
- The marriage depends on how supportive he is (economically)
- She prefers not to ask about his life in Kalimantan
Narratives of these people

Role accomplishment

Food

Companionship

Care

Security

Money
Some conclusions

• Gender negotiations that are hidden by the predominance of stigma as an issue
• Stigma just a part of the whole individual life
• The variety of stories give account of new ways of experiencing love
• Leprosy is a good example of how relationships are mediated by rationality
• More qualitative research needed in the field of intimate citizenship
• Leprosy a way to understand human condition: fragile, manipulative, changeable, inconstant but also a plenty of love, life and joy accepted in different ways.