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Ghost Stories around the 2010 Eruption of Mount Merapi in Indonesia

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Abstract:

Ghost stories usually emerge after the tragic events such as war, riots, disaster, and accidents with many victims died. Who created them and why they were created, nobody knows. However, they circulated in the society and strongly influenced the behaviour of the people. Some theories mentions that ghost stories reveal the hidden messages which cannot be manifested in other ways because of the limited capacity of those who want to send that message. This paper studies ghost stories around the eruption of Mount Merapi in 2010. It concludes that the ghost stories reveal the messages from the grassroots about their social problems suppressing them.

Keywords: Ghost Story, Mount Merapi, message, grass root

1. Introduction

The 2010 eruption of Merapi volcano is considered the biggest one among other big eruptions in the years of 1768, 1822, 1848, 1873, 1930, 1931. It took place on 26 October and 5 November 2010 and is categorized in the third level of VEI (volcanoes explosion index) because of its strong explosion.¹ According to the Indonesian National Board for Disaster Management (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana), it affected the total number of 224,250 people in Central Java and 54,153 people in Yogyakarta Special Region. There were total number of 7,129 damaged in the affected areas of 32 villages in Central Java and Yogyakarta Special Region. The death toll reached 347. The loss is estimated at 5 trillion rupiah.

Many researches have been conducted covering almost all aspects of the 2010 Merapi eruption. To mention a few, those studies cover the general overview of the 2010 Merapi eruption (Wahyunto et al., 2011), the impacts of the 2010 Merapi eruption on the agricultural fields (Haryono et al., 2011; Rahayu et al. 2014;), the impacts of the 2010 Merapi eruption on the economic life of the society (Priyanti et al., 2011), the impact of the cold lava flood of Mount Merapi (Nuraisyah et al., 2012), the management of sand mining after the 2010 Merapi eruption (Ikhsan et al., 2009; Kusmiyati, 2019), the livelihood adaptation (Umaya et al. 2020; Nofrita et al., 2014), the responses of a community-based tourism village to the 2010 Merapi eruption (Erda Rindrasih, 2018), the use of medical mask as respiratory protection (Schwartz-Marin et al. 2020), the communication about myths (Wardyaningrum, 2019), the land management in the slopes of Merapi after the 2010 eruption of Merapi (Sri Nuryani, 2020), the land reconstruction and conservation after the eruption (Abdullah Abas Idjuddin et al.).

One phenomenon which has not been studied is the ghost stories which emerged during the 2010 Merapi eruption. It's true that ghost stories usually appear when an accident or disaster takes many lives. During the periods of Merapi eruption in 2010, the ghost stories about the heroic key master (Jv. *jurukunci*) of Mount Merapi named Mbah Maridjan and that about the sand and wood of Merapi circulated in the society. Surprisingly, these stories never appeared in the previous eruptions. The phenomenon, of course, is crucial to be studied.

Ghost stories have become research objects. Kurniastuti (2009) studied ghost stories about the 1998 riots in Indonesia, especially the riots in Jakarta and Solo. Julia Kunz (2016) in the article titled 'The Ghost as a Metaphor for Memory in the Irish Literary Psyche' searched three novels telling about ghost stories. Maik Hildebrandt in the article titled 'Medieval Ghosts: the Stories of the Monk of Byland' found that ghost stories reflected the medieval Church teaching regarding life after life. Minwen Huang (2016) studied the Chinese culture related to ghost in the article titled 'From Cultural Ghosts to Literary Ghosts - Humanisation of Chinese Ghosts in Chinese Zhiguai.'

In line to the previous researches, this paper makes a reflective study to answer the question of 'what are the messages of ghost stories around the 2010 Merapi eruption?' This study found that the ghost stories seek to reveal the voice of the grassroots which cannot be sounded in other ways. Hopefully, it can enrich the ghost story theories which are existing and practically can encourage the social improvement for the similar experiences.

¹ Badan Geologi Kementerian Energi dan Sumber Daya Mineral (Geological Body of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources). 'Sejarah Letusan Gunung Merapi' (History of Merapi Eruption) in Online: <https://vsi.esdm.go.id/index.php/gunungapi/data-dasar-gunungapi/542-g-merapi?start=1> accessed in 7 February 2021.

2. Short Overview of the 2010 Merapi Eruption

Mount Merapi located in the provinces of Yogyakarta Special Region and Central Java in the Java Island of Indonesia is considered sacred by the Javanese people. With its altitude of 2930 meters above the sea level, it looks haunted and is believed to having spiritual powers. There are myths regarding its emergence and the spirits which protect its areas.² The myths reveal the spirit names, such as *Eyang Merapi*, *Eyang Sapujagad*, *Eyang Megantara*, *Eyang Antaboga*, *Nyai Gadung Melati*, *Kyai Petruk*, *Kyai Sapu Angin*, *Kyai Wola Wali*, *Kartadimejo*.³ The spirits had their respective roles as the commanders in the Kingdom of Jin led by Queen Merapi. Wardyaningrum (2019) wrote the myths about Mount Merapi which were believed by the Javanese people.

Mount Merapi is also believed to have a mystical relationship with the Yogyakarta Palace. There is a concept of an imaginary line connecting Mount Merapi, Yogyakarta Palace and the South Sea which symbolizes the Javanese philosophy of the unity between God and his creation. Every year, a traditional ceremony called *Labuhan Merapi* is held in the Merapi area to give thanks for God's grace. The ceremony is led by a Merapi key master who is appointed by the Sultan of Yogyakarta. A Merapi key master is usually considered a charismatic person who has spiritual relation with Mount Merapi and is supposed to know the condition of Merapi which will or will not erupt. Then, he becomes a patron for the residents around Merapi. He has also responsibility to make decision for the residents whether leaving their houses if Merapi will erupt or not leaving if the situation is not dangerous. It happened with Mbah Maridjan, the charismatic key master of Merapi when Merapi erupted in 2006 and 2010.

In the 2006 Merapi eruption, Mbah Maridjan did not go down the mountain even though the Sultan and the local government commanded all the residents around Merapi to go to the refugee's shelter. It seems he got 'spiritual message' that the eruption would not hit his area. Fortunately, he was safe. The hot clouds or a pyroclastic surge of Merapi did not hit him. Because of that, he was hailed as the 'superman' and was made an advertisement star of a drink product. His words 'strong, strong' (*Jv. rosa-rosa*) in the advertisement were spoken everywhere to be motivational quote.

But the 2010 Merapi eruption was different. Mbah Maridjan was still the iconic figure because of his charismatic experience during the 2006 eruption. Again, he disobeyed the command of Sultan HB X to go down the mountain when Merapi erupted. As the key master of Merapi, he preferred to stay in his house with some people around Merapi rather than to go down the mountain just for his own safety. Unfortunately, when the hot clouds swept his area, he was burnt and died in the prayer position called *sujud*. Then, he was respected as a person with great loyalty and responsibility to his job. Ghost story about Mbah Maridjan, then, popped up. Also, other ghost stories related to Merapi eruption circulated from mouth to mouth, from ear to ear. They strongly influenced the behaviour of the people.

As mentioned above, the 2010 Merapi eruption was a major disaster which brought many victims and huge losses. However, the eruption which spewed the 150 million cubic meters of the material provides benefits for the people around. The ash from Merapi has good quality for fertilizing the agricultural land (Rahayu et al., 2014:69; Sri Nuryani et al. p. 6). Likewise, the Merapi sands provide jobs for thousands of people with traditional and modern sand mining (Ikhsan, 2008; Arief K. Syaifulloh, 2020). So, the people of Merapi refer to Mount Merapi as a grandmother who always provides fortune for her grandchildren. No matter how big the loss caused by its eruption, Merapi is still respected as a gift of life for the surrounding community.

3. Methods of the Study

The study is a reflective one (Mortari, 2015). It reflects the ghost stories around the 2010 Merapi eruption circulating in the society. The data were collected with focus group discussion and interviews from May to June 2011. Focus Group Discussion was conducted with the male survivors on 12 May 2011 and with the female on 19 May 2011. Interviews with the residences were done in their houses in Kaliurang and Kali Jeruk villages. Interviews with some survivors were conducted in the temporary shelter built by the government. With three survivors who were still hospitalized in Sarjito Hospital, Yogyakarta, interview was held in the patient room.

Some data had been analysed with critical discourse analysis theory and published in the book entitled *Spiritualitas Warga Merapi: Agency dan Survival Strategy dalam Merespon Bencana* or 'The Spirituality of the Merapi Inhabitants: Agency and Survival Strategy in Responding Disaster' (2012) whereas the data about ghost stories are being reflected and written for this article.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. The Existence of Ghost

Not all people believe in the existence of ghost. Unfortunately, those who believe in it cannot describe completely the entities of ghost, because the perceptions of people about ghost are various. It depends on their own experiences. Hilary Evans (2002:3) wrote, 'Whether or not ghosts are real, ghost experiences are certainly real.' Even, Carl Gustav Jung, the expert in psychology with his ideas called by Elaine Aaron as 'innate sensitivity' had numerous 'encounters with the other world.' Claudia Richter (2016) presented some Jung's experiences with ghost in her article titled 'Carl Gustav Jung and the Ghosts.'

²Online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tnb0vV5ls8I>;

³The description about the myths about Mount Merapi also can be read in the following Online: <https://www.krjogja.com/berita-lokal/diy/yogyakarta/berikut-mitos-gunung-merapi-yang-dipercayai-sampai-saat-ini/> accessed on 10 February 2021. Eyang is the Javanese term for grandparent. Kyai and Nyai are the Javanese designation for the respectable elderly people.

Hilary Evans (2002:13-58) classified the sorts of ghost based on the ghost experiences. The first are the ghosts from the past. Those are revenant, deathbed and near-death apparitions, and haunters. Revenant is ghost of the return to earth of someone, who formerly alive, is now dead. Deathbed and near-death apparition are the vision experienced by the dying one about those, usually relatives, who have died. Haunter is 'on going ghost.' He or she is the spirit of someone who has died. But unlike the revenant who appeared only once, the haunter manifests repeatedly. The haunter, although he or she has died and left the world, still left some portion of himself behind. That is why haunter still repeatedly appear to someone. The haunter is usually the former owner of a house who sometimes visits those who stay in his or her former house.

The second are the ghosts of the present. Those are crisis apparitions, living ghosts, and autophany and bi-location. Crisis of apparition is spirit of one individual, who is in such a critical experience, serious accident, or in the occasion of death, appearing to someone closely associated such as wife or husband or business partner. Living ghost is the spirit of the one who is still alive, visiting his or her relatives. In fact, that one did not visit them. Autophany and bi-location is the experience of someone in his or her unconsciousness because of drug or sleeping meeting or seeing himself or herself.

Third are the ghosts out of time. This sort of ghosts transcends the limitation of time. For example, I think of my friend, Rina. Fortunately, not long after that, I meet Rina. The other example is the ghost who appears in the forms of sound, the extinction of electricity, or the changes of the position of things from their previous location.

The last are the ghosts of animals and the ghosts sensed by animals. Usually, ghosts of animals are revenant; the favourite pets which have died manifest to the master. Because of its instinct, some animals have special sensitivity. They can sense ghosts which human being cannot sense them. These are the ghosts sensed by animals.

James van Praagh (2008:54-65) explained more about the reasons why a ghost decides to become earthbound and then haunts the living. A person who died when he or she has not yet finished his or her business tends to be the earthbound. For instance, a husband who had not informed his insurance or other business to his wife when he died. Then, he informed it through his ghost. This sort of ghost even can be very influential and helpful for the living. The unexpected and sudden death, such as a car accident or murder, can be the reason why the ghost of those experiencing it would not leave the world soon. Van Praagh also mentioned about a ghost of obsession. It refers to the ghosts of those who died when they have not yet reached all of their obsession. Their ghosts will pursue all their obsession by facilitating their relatives or partners who are still in the world. A ghost may appear just because he or she is not satisfied with the way she or he was buried. Once he or she said that he or she wanted to be buried in one cemetery. But, in fact, he or she was buried in the other one. Besides, a certain religious belief, for example about hell and damnation, may cause a ghost was still in the world, because he or she was afraid with the hell and damnation.

Moreover, Van Praagh elaborated the ways a ghost communicates with the livings. He mentioned that mostly a ghost wants to help the grieving family who was left by the loved one. It is common belief in the society that the spirit of someone who has died is still around the house. Even the spirit can help whatever the family need. The ghost shows a sign in helping the family. The ghost also uses the extra to send his or her messages, for example by tapping the shoulder, blowing the ear, or mussing the hair. The common way the ghost uses to visit the livings is a dream. Other ways the ghost communicates with the human beings are temperature changes, knocking sounds, changes electricity in our lights, photography, and the loss of an object. Of course, the communication between the ghosts and the human beings will be smooth if the human beings can interpret and understand the meaning of the ways of communication. What the messages will be delivered to us through that ways?

4.2. *Memory and Burden of the Past*

Julia Kunz (2016) in the article titled 'The Ghost as a Metaphor for Memory in the Irish Literary Psyche' wrote that the ghosts are metaphor for memory. In the historical context of Ireland, the people of Ireland suffered much because of long period of war. She wrote:

I would like to suggest that the ghost becomes a metaphor for memory; it is also a metaphor for things hidden and buried, for memories that haunt Irish life and culture today and that are therefore expressed and present in art and in contemporary literature. The kind of ghost I want to talk about is metaphorical (2016:107).

Then, she quotes Tabitha King, 'in literature, the ghost is almost always a metaphor for the weight of the past.' So, ghost stories in the society indicate that there was burden in the past of the society. At least, as described above, the ghost stories always have connection with the people produce and consume the stories.

Maik Hildebrandt in the article titled 'Medieval Ghosts: The Stories of the Monk of Byland' found that ghost stories reflected the medieval Church teaching regarding life after life. As explained above that a certain religious belief could strongly influence the people, even up to their dead. Medieval Church teaching about heaven, purgatory, and the damnation of hell, of course, haunts the people. Hildebrandt wrote, 'the dead in the Middle Ages could appear to the living in a variety of forms, be it as the 'official' ghosts that supported Church doctrine about Purgatory and suffrages as well as warn the living to live more virtuously, or as the revenants of Scandinavian folklore that often aggressively attacked the local population' (2016:16).

Kurniastuti (2009) studied ghost stories around the 1998 riots in Indonesia. She documented and analysed the ghost stories about the 1998 riots in Jakarta and Solo. The riots happened following the student's demonstration protested President Soeharto's government who were colored with corruption, collusion, and nepotism. In the seventh period of his presidency, Soeharto appointed his cronies to stay in the cabinet, including his daughter Tutut Soeharto. The student's demonstration was successful to lower Soeharto from his presidency. But the riots that happened in some big cities of

Indonesia ten days before his step down took hundreds of victims died. After that, ghost stories popped up, which then become the topic of Kurniastuti's research.

Actually, Kurniastuti wanted to know the alternatives of the government and media narratives about the Indonesian reformation movement in 1998, because what were published by the government and media were normative and standardized information. By searching the stories from the grassroots, then, she found many things different, including the story of Olivia, a Chinese woman who was raped and gone mad (2009:13). From the ghost stories which she documented, she found the tragic narratives which were not published by the government and the media. Even, the government is still looking for evidences to be willing to admit that the 1998 riots were its responsibility.

Kurniastuti used ghost stories as the instrument to know the other side of the history of the Indonesian reformation movement in 1998 because from her studies she found that 'ghost stories function to circulate cultural and political memory in everyday conversations; these kinds of stories are tied together through different people across time in different places' (2009:118). Quoting the anthropologist, she stated:

To see the connection between the ghost, the society, and the land, anthropologist have conducted research and scientific investigations in many places and communities around the world. They uncover the fact that for hundreds of years, stories about an unidentified power have been orally shared by people. It is undoubted that paranormal phenomena are amenable to all societies and cultures (2009:118).

She concluded that ghost story is a technique to maintain public memories of the 1998 riots. With ghost story, people can share their haunted experiences. Since ghost story is common topic in daily conversation, it is easily to spread out all over the areas. It is successful to perpetuate the memories of the 1998 riots. It also easily gives access to anyone to share and express their memories. An open access is important for the poor and those who have limited access to justice and freedom. Through ghost story, survivors and witnesses of the riots reveal their resistance against the state power which prevented their testimony and memory of the event.

What are the messages of the ghost stories around Merapi eruption in 2010? In the following passage, they will be analyzed.

5. Result and Discussion

5.1. Ghost Stories around the 2010 Merapi Eruption

In the following passage, I will present ghost stories which I collected during my field work. Three ghost stories are being presented.

5.1.1. The Merapi Has a Celebration

The Javanese people around Merapi never used the phrase of 'Merapi erupts' or in the Javanese utterance '*Merapi njeblug*', instead the Javanese expression 'Mount Merapi has a celebration' (Jv. *Merapi duwegawe*). In the Javanese tradition, Mount Merapi is respected as a grandmother (Jv. *simbah*). Therefore, as a grandmother, Merapi never destroyed the people around who are actually her own grandchildren. On other way, she bestowed fertility for the land.

Regarding this thing, my informant, a woman who has rice stall in the kampong of Kalijeruk told me a ghost story. At that time, there was a wedding party. Many people attended it and everything happened in the same way as a real party. Someone who was present in the party said that she ate the real food and even brought home the food as usual in the Javanese tradition. But what was odd was that Mbah Maridjan, the key master of Merapi who had died in the eruption, became one of the receptionist. Even, Mbah Maridjan greeted the guests.

With amazement, of course, the guests realized the presence of Mbah Maridjan. Apparently, the ghost of Mbah Maridjan came to the party.

5.1.2. The Queen of Demak and the Queen of the South

My other informant, Mbah Marno (76), an elder in Kaliurang area, told that he always does a ritual in the night before the Javanese new year (Jv. *malemsatu Sura*). He can talk inside with the spirit of the spiritual guardian of Merapi named Kyai Sapujagad. He was told by Kyai Sapujagad that the Merapi eruption would not attack his area. That is why on the 2010 Merapi eruption he refused to be evacuated to Maguwa shelter. However, he was forced by police to be evacuated there. He was just dropped in the shelter. But, then, he returned to Kaliurang by taxi.

He also told that on the first eruption of Merapi in October 2010, before Mbronggang area was hit by the hot clouds, he was visited by a man and a woman. The man introduced himself as the son of the Queen of Demak (Jv. *Ratu Demak*), whereas the woman was the granddaughter of the Queen of the South Sea (Jv. *Ratu Kidul*). They asked permission to do ritual in the area of Kinahrejo, but they were not permitted. Because of the rejection, the woman did a gesture movement of cursing. So, the area of Kinahrejo and Mbronggang were attacked by the hot clouds and buried in the sand.

After that, with the permission of Mbah Marno, the man and the woman did ritual in the Kaliurang area. That is why Kaliurang area was not affected by Merapi eruption in 2010. About twenty-five people joined the ritual. Those were volunteers, the SAR (Search and Rescue) members, and *lurah* (the head of a village) of Pakem. The ritual was conducted in the universal community prayer which could accommodate those from different religious tradition. During the ritual, the participants described that they heard the voices of the people who are building a house which were very noisy (Jv. *gemremeng*). This situation was interpreted that the mount Merapi was doing a great work. They also saw a light (Jv. *kerlap-kerlip*) which was interpreted as signs from the transcendent one.

After the ritual, there was dialogue between the participants and the woman who introduced herself as the granddaughter of the Queen of the South Sea (Jv. *RatuKidul*). The woman noticed that the people must periodically give offerings (Jv. *sesaji*) for the Merapi. She also said sarcastically, 'The queen of the south is no longer closed to the Sultan; Sultan never greets and visits; supposing dogs and employers, the way of giving food just by throwing it' (Jv. *RatuKidul sudah mulaitidakcocok dengan Sultan; wisora tau ngaruhke; ibaratnyakiridandan majikancaramemberimakannyahanyadilempar*).

Who are actually the man and the woman who introduced themselves as the son of *RatuDemak* and the granddaughter of *RatuKidul*? They are ghosts who manifested themselves during the disaster.

5.1.3. The Sand from Merapi

Other ghost stories were related to the sand from Merapi. Someone from Semarang, Central Java, was visited in a dream that he should return the sand which he took from Merapi. Therefore, following the dream, he brought the sand back to the Merapi area.

Other story told that someone brought the sand from Merapi to Solo by truck. Unfortunately, when he arrived in Solo, he could not open the tub of the truck. Then, he was told by other one that he should return the sand from Merapi to Ngemplak, a kampong in the Merapi area. When he brought back the sand to Ngemplak, the tub of the truck could be opened and the sand were lowered from the truck.

A similar story occurred on the Merapi wood. Someone brought home the Merapi wood. But when he arrived at home, the wood ignites itself without being ignited by a fire. Then, he was afraid and returned the wood to Merapi.

Was there a spiritual power inside the sand and the wood of Merapi? What messages were hidden behind the story?

5.2. Messages from the Grassroots

Analysing the ghost stories, I follow the theories above that the ghosts need to return to the world because of some reasons. It can be because of his or her unfinished business and obsession, so they return to the world to finish his or her business and obsession. It can be for helping the grieving family or community. The fact that the ghost stories popped up in the context of disaster proves that there was something not finished yet. The haunter returned to the earth to support his or her family or community.

The problem that often arose related to disaster is that the government will move people from disaster-prone areas. In fact, it is usually the small people who are affected by the policy. So, government policy is always associated with power because the small people do not have power to protest the government policy. It seems that government simplifies the problem. The fact is that the small people live in disaster-prone areas because they are unable to compete with those who are economically richer to occupy areas that are safe from disasters. According to Steinberg (2000), in this situation there should be moral responsibilities of the people. The poor use their poverty to justify their living in the vulnerable areas. Whereas, the rich people do not realize that what they did is exploiting the nature, which, then, cause the calamities. Therefore, moving those dwelling in the prone areas to other places is not the best solution.

In this context, I am in the same position with Kurniastuti (2009) that ghost story is a technique to maintain public memories. In the same way, the ghost stories around the 2010 Merapi eruption are the ways of the grassroots to maintain the public memories about the social problems around Merapi areas. The grassroots do not have power to voice their opinion. Therefore, ghost stories became medium for delivering their messages. There are messages hidden in the public memories.

Let us consider the three ghost stories presented above. The first is that about the haunter of Mbah Maridjan. When Mbah Maridjan died, he had not yet finished his job as the key master of Merapi. His ghost returned to the world to console the grieving society by helping as a receptionist in the wedding party.⁴ But from the people perspective, the presence of Mbah Maridjan in the wedding party reminds the people about the loyal and responsible leader. Mbah Maridjan was loyal to Sultan HB IX, the one who appointed him to be the key master of Merapi, not to HB X. He was responsible to his job, even, until his dead.

The fact that the people respected Mbah Maridjan as a loyal and responsible person even though he disobeyed the honourable person, Sultan HB X, is something odd. The disloyalty of Mbah Maridjan to the government and Sultan HB X was very sensitive issue, especially in the Javanese context. It never happened in the Javanese tradition that the lower people, such as Mbah Maridjan, disobeyed the such honorable person, Sultan. If it happened, it means there were irregularities in the Sultan HB X government.

In fact, in the year of 2010, there were some social issues related to Special Region of Yogyakarta, such as the status of 'special region', the loss of cultural identity of Yogyakarta, and other issues related to the Sultan's family.⁵ Also, the visit of the hauntings of the Queen of Demak⁶ and the daughter of the Queen of the South⁷ in the second ghost story shows

⁴Newton (2004:14) tells his personal experience visited by the soul of his departed mother just in seconds, but 'this act was meaningful form of closure, causing both of us to release into a sound sleep of Delta state.'

⁵The issue about successor of Sultan HB X was very sensitive, because Sultan HB X does not have son, instead, he has five daughters. Whereas according to Javanese tradition the sultan should be male.

⁶The Queen of Demak actually refers to Queen Kalinyamat who was the descendant of King of Demak. She fled to Jepara and became a Queen in Jepara because his husband and his brother were killed by Arya Penangsang (Nur Said, 2013). Recent days she was proposed to be a national hero because she her struggle against Portuguese invaders in 16th century (<https://news.detik.com/berita-jawa-tengah/d-5515722/membedah-jejak-ratu-kalinyamat-yang-diusulkan-jadi-pahlawan-nasional/3>).

⁷The Queen of the South (Jv. *RatuKidul*) is a legendary figure who is believed to be the spiritual partner of Sunan Surakarta and the Sultan of Yogyakarta.

that the hauntings wanted to intervene the community's problem. The statement of the granddaughter of the Queen of the South about her bad relationship to the acting Sultan strengthens the irregularities existing in the Sultan HB X government. In this regard, the ghost stories about Mbah Maridjan, the Son of the Queen of Demak, and the daughter of the Queen of the South maintain public memories of the grassroots regarding social issues of Yogyakarta in the period of 2010.

In the Javanese social context, silence is golden. Silence is one type of the Javanese language (Berman, 1998). The Javanese mostly speak through silence if there is no power can support them. But in silence, the ghost stories function to deliver the voice of the people.

My informant, who is hotel manager in Kaliurang area, mentioned that there are some taboos in the areas around Merapi. If the taboos are violated then disaster will arise. The taboos are: do not kill monkey because monkey is the spirits' pet, do not provide prostitutes in hotels, and the obligation to carry out the Javanese traditions such as offering to the Mount Merapi and the Javanese festivity (*kenduri, bersih desa* etc.). The warning of the Queen of the South to do offerings fits in this context. Probably, at that time, the Javanese traditions have disappeared in some places.

The third ghost story was the dream about the sand from Merapi. It can be noted that the sand from Merapi is truly the life of Merapi people. The Merapi inhabitants mostly live by sand mining (Ikhsan et al., 2009; Kusmiyati, 2009). The eruption of Merapi is the opportunity for Merapi residents to receive the gift from 'Grandmother' Merapi. It is clear, therefore, that the ghost stories that the sand from Merapi should be returned to Merapi area would emphasize that only the Merapi residents are the legitimate owner of the Merapi sand. There is hidden rule if the people outside Merapi area want to buy the Merapi sand. The ghost stories about the Merapi sand as collective memories reveal that there is something wrong related to the business of Merapi sand.

In fact, residents around Merapi live from traditional sand mining. Since 1992, a modern sand mining has started to grow using heavy equipment, such as a back hoe. By itself, the modern sand mining override the traditional one. However, the permit to conduct modern sand mining is still given by the local government because it increases regional income, even though it brings the bad impact for the roads and environmental damages (Syaifulloh, 2020). Business of sand mining gives many benefits for big companies rather than the small ones. Most Merapi residents just become small workers in charge of raising and lowering the sands to and from the truck. The big companies monopolize business of the Merapi sand. Of course, the business involves those who have power related the business rules. In this context, the ghost stories about the sand from Merapi would send messages that there is injustice in the business of Merapi sand. In this situation, it is true that the ghosts of Merapi returned to the world to help the grieving Merapi residents.

In other words, ghost story is the survival strategy of the grassroots in the midst of competition against those in power. The grassroots used the ghost stories as the medium to deliver their voices against the government and the rich traders who have power to monopolize the business of the Merapi sand. By this way, the grassroots could survive in the midst of disaster. They are voiceless, but with the ghost stories they voice loudly.

6. Conclusion

The ghosts' stories around Merapi eruption in 2010 popped up in the context of disaster. They should be understood in the context of disaster too. The central issue in the disaster context was the government policy to evacuate those who lived in the vulnerable areas, mostly the poor and marginalized. So, ghost stories around Merapi eruption in 2010 were the instruments to maintain public memories especially that about how the poor were marginalized and get unfair treatment. Ghost stories were messages from the grassroots who could not be delivered in other ways because of power relation in the society.

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