

# Community Rituals in Facing Volcanic Eruption Threat in Java

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## Abstract

This research aims to explore the kinds of rituals done by the society in around Merapi mountain facing volcanic mountain eruption threat in Cangkringan and find educational meaning in the ritual. This research uses qualitative approach, phenomenology. Research informants are Cangkringan society, Merapi mountain caretaker, and Cangkringan figures. Data collecting technique are participant observation; the researcher involved directly in the ritual. Data then analyzed by using domain, taxonomic, componential, and cultural theme. Research result shows that Cangkringan society in facing Merapi mountain eruption threat is still traditionally by labuhan ritual, laku *topo bisu* ritual, and sedekah Gunung ritual. These rituals are representation of educational values and local wisdom whose most fundamental objectives are to maintain nature, the values of togetherness, in order and respect to achieve outer and inner harmony.

## Keywords

disaster preparedness; local wisdom; Merapi ritual

## INTRODUCTION

This study is about community rituals in facing Merapi eruption threat in Java. This study gives another addition to the existing literatures on religious culture and volcanic disaster (Dove 2010; Wessing 2010; Daly 2011; Kelman, Mercer, & Gaillard, 2012). This study is important in the way it emphasises on rituals in pre-eruption.

In life, Javanese society always want harmony, with mindset and life of mutual respect, in a unity of society that is bound by the norms of life because of history, tradition, and religion. Javanese culture has been rooted for years and ingrained for the people of Cangkringan (Permana 2016).

Cangkringan people's attitude has their own local wisdom based on ancestral advice, so that until now still alive even in the middle of modern society.

The majority of Cangkringan people still follow the belief system of Kejawen. But in everyday life they still carry out the teachings of Islam, although not as a whole, so that such people remain firm with the old tradition although the elements of the old tradition has acculturated with Islamic teachings (Bhandari 2014; Permana 2016). Ke-

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jawen values still color in the socio-economic and cultural life of Cangkringan society, such as the values of togetherness, harmony, and respect for the environment. The place is where they live together, in order to attain outer and inner harmony (Sasongko 2001; Chen 2006; Zeidler 2016).

As for the ecological wisdom, the Cangkringan community has a kind of unwritten rule that must be obeyed. Some unwritten rules that must be obeyed are: *sedekah Gunung* ritual, *labuhan* ritual, *laku topo bisu* ritual, also the ordinance of grazing or cultivating in places which are considered haunted or hunting animals that are judged to belong to the ruler of Mount Merapi palace (Sasongko 2001; Rakhmat 2007; Permana 2016).

Violations against all of them are believed to be disastrous, not only to the offender itself, but will be felt by the entire community of Cangkringan. Empirically, if observed more deeply, society while maintaining its life cannot escape from its environment (Fatkhan 2014; Walgito 2014).

People are still very dependent on nature; it is clear from the traditional local wisdom of the community in living the relationship. From experience and observations gained from generation to generation, the southern slopes of Mount Merapi in their view of life must always be subject to natural laws and attitudes of '*nrimo ing pandum*' (accept the concrete reality faced as a part of life) (Sasongko 2001; Permana 2016; Humaniora-Bulaksumur 2014).

The basic attitude that society has is that all things are arranged and determined from 'above' (God Almighty). From this perspective of life, there arises an abstraction formed by a way of thinking and ultimately grows a developed guide to life. This is illustrated by the meaning of various ceremonies in Mount Merapi, like *labuhan* tradition that they do. This kind of tradition had been done by their ancestors in ancient times. At the time of Mataram, the concept of Mount Merapi is a symbol of vertical relationship, while the horizontal symbol is Ratu Kidul (Hiryanto 2013; Permana 2016; Daly 2011).

At the time of Mataram, Mount Merapi was symbolized as Lingga, whereas Laut Kidul as Yoni, so until nowadays Merapi mountain and Laut Kidul become a symbol of God universe and is still preserved by the people of Mataram by performing rituals, one of them is *Labuhan Merapi* (Toha 2003; Permana 2016).

The ritual ceremony is as gratitude to God Almighty and also to the spirit of Merapi inhabitants who have kept their salvation and welfare in carrying out his life (Rajib 2001; Kasdan 2016; Sheets 2011). In reality, people's understanding on the meaning of the rituals performed together with the Yogyakarta palace has an impact on the ecology of the Merapi people in running their lives that always depend on the natural resources of Mount Merapi and will always be respectful to the Palace of ghost that inhabits Mount Merapi.

People are more trusting rituals that are still alive even in the midst of modern society today (Chen 2006; Fatkhan 2014; Rossano 2011), so from this, researchers are interested to find the rituals conducted by the community in facing the threat of eruption of Mount Merapi, then the findings are verified by the experts and practitioners of culture to look for the educational meaning implied, so as to increase awareness of the community of Cangkringan to always preserve the culture that society has (Ritchie 2011; Schlehe 2010; Mei & Lavagne 2012).

This research uses a qualitative approach with ethno phenomenology method to find educational values implicitly states in society rituals to face threat of Merapi eruption in Cangkringan region. This research was conducted in Cangkringan Sub-district, Yogyakarta. The reason for choosing Cangkringan Sub-district is because of the attitude of the people who have their own local wisdom based on the advice passed down from generation to generation by their ancestors, so that until now still alive even in the midst of modern society.

The instruments of data collection are observation, interview, and documentation. Observation was done in a participative, frank and disguised, and unstructured way

to know the object to be studied, in this case is the informants. To obtain more accurate data observation, after doing observation, the researcher did the process of documentation, filing, and collecting some facts and information to the level of concept and theory.

Interviews were done by snowball sampling technique so that the data is focused there are much data that can be applied. Information was gained from the caretaker of Merapi, the elder community of Cangkringan (2 people), Cangkringan villagers (2 people). Researchers used descriptive and structural questions to get information related to the rituals performed by the community to face the threat of Merapi eruption in Cangkringan area.

The data obtained were analyzed by domain analysis technique, taxonomy, component with the process of organizing and reducing the data into the patterns, categories and basic descriptive units so that the theme can be determined and formulated into a conclusion. The cultural there Analysis is performed at the time of data collection and after the completion of data collection. The analysis is done to organize, sort, code, and categorize the data so that the description can be found in accordance with the aspects studied.

## The Forms of Community Ritual in Facing Mount Merapi Eruption Threat

### a) Labuhan Merapi Ritual

Ritual ceremony of Labuhan Merapi is a mixture of folklore between oral and non spoken elements. The implementation of traditional ceremonies require *uborampe* or offerings. The offering is the actualization of thoughts, desires, and feelings to get closer to God Almighty. The offering is also a symbolic discourse that is used as a means for spiritual negotiation of the unseen. This is done so that the spirits above the power of man do not interfere. By feeding symbolically to spirits, it is hoped that the spirit will be benign, and will help human life.

Labuhan ceremony procession begins at 06.00 WIB Merapi *Juru Kunci* and *abdi*

*dalem* walk together towards the one post led by the caretaker of Merapi, upon arrival at post one (timanganti), a place of *punden berundak*. All *ubo rampe* like *setaman* flower, umbrella, red box (box of Merapi), fruits / crops, *ingkung* are lowered and followed by burning incense.



**Figure 1.** Abdidalem's entourage with the Society of Cangkringan walk to Timanganti (Permana, 2016)

In the Timanganti, there are several rituals whose core is to pray praise for welfare, and serenity, to ask permission to the Merapi guard to continue the ceremony to the next post, and to reflect and ask forgiveness of Allah for the sin that has been done.

After completion of the procession in Timanganti (post 1) the trip is continued to Bangsal Sri Manganti as the peak of the series of labuhan ceremony. The main ceremony of Labuhan Merapi begins after the entourage of abdidalem Punokawan Kration Yogyakarta led by Gunung Merapi caretaker, Kliwon Suraksohargo (Mr. Asih) to Bangsal Sri Manganti. Dozens of servants in this palace bring offerings of *sego* savory (delicious rice) and side dishes in the form of chicken meat stew. In addition, they also carry 10 kinds of *uborampe* that would be "given" to the eight "administrators of the kingdom of Mount Merapi" or HargoMerapi. 10 kinds of *uborampe* were removed from Red Merapi box.

Then the ceremony is continued with the prayer recital asking for safety from the danger of Merapi eruption disaster. Earlier, the magistrate SulaksoRejoso stepped forward to the great stone of Sri Manganti to

pray in Javanese while burning incense. The burning of the incense is usually intended as “Talining Daking kang Maha Kuwaos” (as a belt-tying belt). The flame is expected as the light of kumara, the smoke is expected as the smell of heaven, and to be accepted by God Almighty).



**Figure 2.** The Abdidalem prepare Ubo Rampe For LabuhanMerapi Ceremony (Permana, 2016)



**Figure 3.** The Procession of Prayer Recital For Safety (Permana, 2016)

Deeply analyzed, it can be understood that burning incense in the mystical ritual of some Javanese Muslims, or incorporating it as mystical elements is not a polytheistic behavior, as some Muslims are claimed to be more puritanical. In the days of the Prophet Ibrahim, there is a habit of burning incense. For the time of Prophet Muhammad SAW, incense burning was often replaced by wearing fragrant smells, expressed as “favored by God”. Both incense and perfume essence the same, namely to get closer to God.

#### **b) Laku Topo Bisu Ritual**

Mount Merapi, in the view of the Cangkrin-

gan community is the naval universe in the land of Java. On the other hand, Mount Merapi is a living mountain that is constantly increasing and changing, so if it is indeed Mount Merapi erupted, he invites anyone to plead the Salvation to the Almighty. The request is done through tirakat by walking around Kinahrejo hamlet three rounds or *topo bisu*.

*Topo bisu* is a ritual performed by encircling Hamlet of Kinahrejo three times. From Kinahrejo to Kali Adem, Ngrakah, and enter again through the gate in front of Umbulharjo Village Hall. One round takes a distance of about five kilometers. That is, three lap times reaches fifteen kilometers.

Those who participate in this ritual, should not speak a word eat, drink, smoke, and others. All they do is walking while praying. If rest, they must remain in a standing position. This is done as a form of supplication, and prayer to the Almighty that we are given His protection.

This ritual is usually started at the house of the caretaker of Merapi. But before this ritual takes place, the caretaker and other residents opened it by reciting SuratYasin and tahlil at the Al-Amin Mosque, 100 meters from his home. After that, the caretaker changed the *ageman* (clothing) in the form of dark blue and blangkon.

Ritual of Lampah Bisu is done by bringing two heirlooms, namely keris and spear. Keris is wrapped in white satin cloth. While the spear is wrapped in red and white cloth. The spear is believed by many as the incarnation of dragon guards of Mount Merapi. The dragon that surrounds the mountain after being killed by Kyai Panembahan, it is said that the spear was obtained by the caretaker while doing my man in Srimanganti *paseban* which is 2.5 km from the top of Merapi.

#### **c) Sedekah Gunung Ritual**

*Desa mawa cara negara mawa tata* is a simple understanding in Javanese society culture in general. This can simply mean that the village has civilization and the State has rules. Each region or natural environment has its own set of ways and means. Different

people, different customs, traditions, and cultures is the meaning of local wisdom, the noble value of human relationships with the natural environment which then gave birth to wisdom. The value of local wisdom contains the awareness of the identity of a nation. "Identity" which is included geography, geology, and social character.

For those who better understand the "identity", one can be more wise in living the order of life as an attitude to be a submissive man, and always worship to God the Giver of Life. So is the case with the Cangkringan people who always keep the customs and Cultures that have been inherited from the Patriarchs as a guide that has been inherited from generation to generation.

One form of preservation of custom or culture that has been on the run by Merapi residents, especially in the southern slope precisely in Cangkringan, Sleman, Yogyakarta is the alms of Mount Merapi. The procession of alms of Mount Merapi was carried out in Joglo Merapi and coincided with the night of the turn of the year in the Javanese

calendar or more often called the night of 1 Suro or 1 Muharram in Islamic calendar, which is an important and sacred night for many citizens living in the influence of Javanese culture. On this evening, many areas in Central Java and Yogyakarta hold various kinds of rituals or ceremonies, including people who live on the slopes of Mount Merapi.

One of the processions in the series of alms of Mount Merapi is cutting a buffalo head to be brought to the top of Mount Merapi. In addition to inheriting the culture of the ancestors, alms of Mount Merapi has the most important meaning of thanksgiving to God for all the blessings that have been received and also the plea of Salvation in order to avoid all dangers.

### Inferred Educational Meanings inside the Community Rituals

The form of ritual as a homage to the community to remind that people will die and become spirits like the ancestors, therefore in his life man must develop a good life to

**Table 1.** Inferred Educational Meanings Inside the Community Rituals

Kinds of Ritual	Fact	Inferred Educational Meanings
Upacara Labuhan	People believe in Mount Merapi as the embodiment of the Universe Gede (house of God),	Nature and its contents (empirical and non empirical) is the creation of God, so it is appropriate that we as human beings must show a good relationship in order to maintain each other and respect
Laku <i>Topo Bisu</i>	Communities believe in Mount Merapi as a manifestation of the palace of spirits and are believed when the spirits are having intent is marked by the eruption of Mount Merapi.	Humans must always synergize and cooperate with Nature and its contents both visible and invisible, the form of synergy with humans to maintain and preserve the natural ecosystem so that nature is not extinct so that nature is able to provide signs when there is the occurrence of eruption
<i>Sedekah Gunung</i>	Communities believe that the top of Mount is inhabited by sacred or savage animals and the area is forbidden for people to engage in farming and farming activities, and the search for grass for cattle.	The preservation of protected forests should be maintained so that when there is eruption, Merapi forest can play a role as its function to withstand the lava rate of Mount Merapi.

(Source: Permana 2016)

the environment of others, nature and supernatural nature. This is revealed in the community's belief in the hierarchy and the placement of ancestral spirits in the palace of the spirits of Mount Merapi, in accordance with the conduct and actions and work for life. All messages if we are full of philosophical messages to live are always earthy with nature and the environment we find.

For the people, Mount Merapi symbolize as a tool that can provide benefits and threats. Mount Merapi plays an important role in the life of the community of Cangkringan both in terms of economic and socio cultural aspects. Mount Merapi, environment, and nature, and the culture of society, is a unity that cannot be separated. The continuity and harmony of life between the four appears in every community activity. The appreciation and respect for Merapi and its nature is always put forward. According to the community's beliefs, Mount Merapi and its nature are something to be respected and appreciated.

The existence of Mount Merapi has given birth to its own perception for the community residing on the slopes of Mount Merapi actually feel protected, safe and comfortable, even from the eruption of Mount Merapi if the community live harmoniously and in harmony with Mount Merapi. If people are willing to respect and maintain the natural of Mount Merapi, the grace will come. The perception built on people's belief in Merapi is not only a symbol and a worldview of society, but also a transcendental belief that builds strong dynamic interactions and forms a cultural ethos assuming that humans and other living beings are part of the universe.

As a macrocosm the universe can influence the way of human life, through certain signs (natural phenomena) such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, rain and others. To date, local people still hold traditional ceremonies or rituals to transform these transcendental beliefs.

## CONCLUSION

The ritual ceremony is as gratitude to God

Almighty and also to the spirits of the inhabitants of Merapi who have kept their salvation and welfare in carrying out his life. In reality, the slopes of Mount Merapi in running their lives, having understood the meaning arising from the rituals performed together with the Yogyakarta palace, has had an impact on the ecology of the Merapi people in running their lives that always depend on the natural resources of Mount Merapi and will always be respectful to the palace of spirits who inhabit Mount Merapi.

The ritual event of society in facing the threat of eruption of Merapi if deeply understood has local wisdom First a concrete manifestation of the synergy between nature, Humans and plants in a partnership with the goal of mutual safeguard. Second, the giving of offerings is requested that the sentient beings participate in praying for the welfare of the people of Yogyakarta showing the good relationship between jinn and man and believing that they exist and join the worship of the God Almighty. This is in line with the sound of the verse of the Qur'an letter ad-Dzariyat verse 56 which means "And I do not create the jinn and man but to worship Me." IbnKathir explains this verse that, "God created man and the jinn in order that they might worship Him".

Worship is important as the heart of worship is prayer, fear, hope, trust, love and others. All the great forms of worship should be addressed to God only. Third, the prayers offered in the ritual have the hope that the Cangkringan region in particular and the Yogyakarta area is generally safe, peaceful, and safe. "Although for example Mount Merapi there is turmoil, but still expected the area of Yogyakarta secure peaceful fertile, prosperous. Amien, showing a relationship with the creator (hablumminAllah).

Fourth, the presence of kanthil tree planting during the ceremony of Labuhan Merapi. Kanthil tree means *kumanthil-manthil*, so that humans are always close to nature. Fifth, the ritual performed by the community also teaches us how important the tolerance, please help, do not distinguish human degrees, mutual sacrifice and mutual cooperation, this is proven by their

willingness in climbing mountain volcano tens of kilometers not look old, children, Young, rich and poor women, they remain orderly and khitmat in following the ritual procession bail ritual event labuhan Merapi, topobisu behavior, and sedekah Mount Merapi.

Here is a fanatical attitude, that all things are arranged and determined from the 'above' (God Almighty). From this perspective of life, there arises an abstraction formed by a way of thinking and ultimately grows a developed and guide to life. This is illustrated by the meaning of various ceremonies in Mount Merapi, like the tradition of *labuhan* that they do. This kind of tradition had been done by their ancestors in ancient times. At the time of Mataram the concept of Mount Merapi is a symbol of vertical relationship, while the horizontal symbolize is Ratu Kidul. At the time of Mataram, Mount Merapi was symbolized as Linga, while the Sea was leaved as Yoni, so until now the Merapi and Laut Kidul became the symbol of the universe of God and still preserved by the people of Mataram by performing rituals, one of them is Labuhan-Merapi.

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