

# The Lesson of Mbah Maridjan: The Locksmith of Merapi Mountain to Face the Threat of Eruption

Septian Aji Permana<sup>a</sup>, <sup>a</sup>Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta, Jalan PGRI I, Sonosewu No. 117, Yogyakarta, 55182, Indonesia, Email: [aji@upy.ac.id](mailto:aji@upy.ac.id)

This research aims at revealing the society's perception towards the Merapi Mountain and understanding the lesson of Mbah maridjan to face the eruption of the mountain. This research employs a qualitative approach to reveal the perception of society regarding the Merapi Mountain. The respondents, or the informants, of this research are the family of Mbah Maridjan and the inhabitants of Cangkringan as the place where Mbah maridjan lived, and carried out his life-activities. To collect the research data, observations, interviews, and documentation were conducted. The gaining data will be analysed using a descriptive analytic model. The results indicate that the society has the perception that Merapi Mountain is a sacred place. It is the centre of the spirit in the Java Island. Mbah Maridjan was known as an elder, not because he is more than 80 years old, but because he possesses the spiritual capabilities. He is the role model of others, because of his big responsibilities. He is more as the ship captain. A captain will not leave his ship, no matter happens, he will prefer to sink and die with the ship. Mbah Maridjan, as the locksmith of Merapi Mountain, insisted not to leave Merapi when it began to give signs of eruption. In his heart, he prefers to die because of the ash clouds in the slope of Merapi rather than leave it.

**Key words:** *Mbah Maridjan, Local Wisdom, Merapi Mountain.*

## Introduction

Merapi Mountain, as one of the natural elements that is the source of life, should be well considered. It needs to maintain a good relationship between man and nature, not merely based on exploiting it. On the other hand, the relationship should be more on maintaining each other to create harmony between humans and nature. People of Cangkringan believe that the ones

who break the rule, will receive punishment from the people or from the nature spirit which is believed to be the ruler of the mountain.

The Cangkringan people believe in the existing mountain ruler, can be clearly revealed in some traditions such as religious ceremonies and traditional *Labuhan Merapi*. The basic and in-depth representation of values consist of the value of togetherness, harmony, and respect to the nature, the place where people live, stay together to gain harmony physically and mentally (Permana, 2016)

Attempts keep harmony with the Merapi Mountain is also reflected on the time when it was erupted in 2010, affecting Kinahrejo, Pelemsari District, Umbulharjo Village, Purwobinangun Village, Turgo District, Kepulharo Village, and Kaliadem District. The act of believing in the nature was revealed when the people insisted on living here. They did not want to go anywhere to save themselves, even when the place was destroyed by the fire and ash cloud which made it not safe to live in. This phenomenon is understandable since it is an act to live in harmony with the place where these people live. They assume that this place is their homeland and the activity of the Merapi Mountain is just the natural process which has spirit (Permana, 2017).

The top of Merapi Mountain may be cracked and thundering due to the push of magma, but the people of Cangkringan in Turgo District, Srumbung or Kinahrejo remained calm. They stayed with their daily activities such as grazing or looking for wood around Merapi. The saying of Cangkringan people is that Merapi is blessed. The people will not move or be moved to relocate, this is proof that the people hold the local wisdom.

Although they were refugees, the daily activities were still conducted. The act of insisting not to be relocated, other people believed life was as it should be. This is due to the people's existence as the inhabitants of Merapi's slope who have this culture are able to live side by side with the environment of Merapi. This intangible relationship is hard to be separated. This is true and undeniable that people are afraid of the Merapi earthquake, but far more than that, they expect that the eruption brings the blessing from the God (Permana, 2017).

The simple life, as many people said to him, was applied to the life of R. Ng. Suraksoharjo, or as he is more commonly known, Mbah Maridjan. There is no arrogance in the life of the locksmith of the Merapi Mountain, although there was rumour that he denied the order of Hamengkubuwono X and the Vice President of Indonesia to be evacuated when the Merapi Mountain started to erupt. The act of defence by Mbah Maridjan was one of the realizations of the obedience of the locksmith of the Merapi Mountain, as his name Suroksoharjo literally means 'to look after the mountain'.

Mbah Maridjan has been the locksmith of the Merapi Mountain since 1982, he continued the mandate from his father, Mbah Turgo, to continuously look after the mountain of Merapi. These two people (Mbah Turgo and Mbah Maridjan) were the court retainers of Yogyakarta Palace, appointed by Ngarsa Dalem of the Palace Sri Sultan Hamengkubuwono IX as the mediator between humans and the holy spirits. Mbah Maridjan had special duty to conduct the traditional ritual of Labuhan to the top of Merapi Mountain in every 30 Rejeb Tahun Saka (the Javanese calendar which is influenced by Hinduism).

People believe and admit that Mbah Maridjan is the one who understands Merapi Mountain, because in every event/happen about the mountain, he is the one who had the authority to explain things related to the eruption of the mountain. The one which interests this in depth study is the position of the management of Mbah Maridjan, as the locksmith of Merapi Mountain, who faces the threat of Merapi's eruption.

### **Material and Method**

This research employs the qualitative approach to conduct an in-depth study about the local wisdom of Mbah Maridjan to the slope of Merapi Mountain and his integrity and position as the court retainer who is ordered by the Sultan of Yogyakarta Palace. The results will be studied and reviewed together with experts and practitioners.

This research was conducted in the special region of Yogyakarta, with the setting of the research in the sub-district of Cangkringan. The reason for this is that Cangkringan was where Mbah Maridjan lived and the people of this area have the perception that Merapi's eruption is not a threat, but a blessing.

The subjects of this research are the people of Cangkringan who are assumed to have knowledge and understanding about Mbah Maridjan as the locksmith of Merapi mountain. The techniques of data collection are the method of life history, observation, and interview. The instrument of data collection is the guidance to interview about the perspective/knowledge on Mbah Maridjan, the locksmith of Merapi Mountain.

Things that we aim to reveal during this in-depth review are the experiences related to the various activities that have been conducted by Mbah Maridjan, and the knowledge that has possessed towards the perception regarding Merapi. The research also aims to understand why eruptions happen and how to avoid it through facing and solving the disaster through the charisma of Mbah Maridjan as the locksmith of Merapi Mountain.

The data that has been collected will be analysed by using the domain analysis. This is the process of organizing and reducing the data into patterns, categorizes, and basic description units to decide themes and to formulize a conclusion. The analysis was conducted in the time

when data collection is in process and after it has been completely collected. The analysis process consists of arranging, sorting, and categorizing the data to find the description based on the theme being researched.

### **Literature Review**

According to Lies Rahayu (Center of Disaster, University of Gadjah Mada, Indonesia), the education of disaster is a life-long education for the sake of humanity. The disaster education program is a way to draw participation from all people to sustainably overcome the disaster. Considering that Indonesia is an archipelago prone of the disaster, the readiness to face it should be campaigned earlier to all people. This is the reason why the disaster education movement should be conducted as it will make the disaster threat easier to overcome and the risks can be minimized.

Communication becomes the central component of the disaster education, in which the implementation can employ various media such as radio, visual (poster, leaflet, booklet, pocketbook, newspapers), or even audio-visual (television). The existing research by Lies Rahayu was conducted in a formal setting, by using a teaching and learning contextual approach. This approach is the learning process of disaster according to the disaster types around the students. It makes sure that the students are can observe, identify, analyze, and synthesize the disaster case that can be found.

Hiryanto, in his journal article entitled “Local Wisdom Identification on Understanding Natural Disaster Signs by Elders in Yogyakarta”, stated that the local wisdom can be used as the concept of disaster mitigation, especially for the Javanese people who still hold the cultural values. The research was conducted in Bantul Yogyakarta, regarding the earthquake which happened in 2006. He described and revealed various knowledges from the local wisdom of the elders in Yogyakarta regarding signs of earthquakes in this region.

Chin-Lien has written a journal article entitled “Development and Implementation of Disaster Reduction Technology in Taiwan”. She explained that to increase efficiency and to reduce a disaster’s risks, cooperation with surrounding people through the organization of NAPHM is necessary. This organization detects the disaster’s mitigation in Taiwan. NAPHM was changed into NCDR in 2018, and the accuracy of the technology are now more accountable. NCDR creates technology for disaster mitigation to detect earthquakes and eruptions which are distributed to the people so they are more responsive on the upcoming disasters.

## Results

Merapi Mountain has an important role in cosmology for the people of Cangkringan. They believe that Merapi can both give and take away things from people. The eruption can be fertilizer, for farming. However, it impacts on the destroying for the villages, sacrifices many things.

The people of Cangkringan believe that there are other than humans inhabit the world. The spirits have their own organizations which rule their own government with their own attributes and activities. Merapi is assumed as the palace of the holy spirit which is led by the spirit of the dead.

The relationship among Merapi Mountain, nature, and human has been united. Various myths accompany those three elements, although they are hard to understand logically. Many people still believe in these myths. One of the myths that is still believed by the people of Cangkringan is that the eruption of Merapi happens due to the natural impact and the mechanism that happened.

According to the people of Cangkringan, before the Merapi erupts, nature will give signs. Animals such as tigers, forest wolves and forest monkeys are going to come down the mountain. This knowledge was gained from the experience of Mbah Maridjan and the people of Cangkringan. Using knowledge and inherited traditions about Merapi Mountain, people assume that as the one of activities of the holy spirit of Merapi. It is believed that the palace is led by the spirit of Empu Rama and PERmadi, people of Cangkringan know him as Kyai Marpala. It is believed that there are some other figures inhabit the Palace of Merapi.

The belief in the palace of the spirit not only held by Yogyakarta palace, it spreads to the people of Cangkringan. People believe in the concept of afterlife and they believe that the spirit of the dead will inhabit the place based on what he did during the life. The dead who did the good things in life will live in the palace of the spirit of Merapi. On the other hand, if the dead did the bad things during life, the spirit will be thrown away from the palace to inhabit the stone, trees, or other quiet places.

People believe that Merapi is the sacred place surrounded by the haunted places, such as Turgo Hill. It is believed that the places are preserved by the spirits and we cannot do bad things there. There are spirits in that place that should be always respected. In that place, people cannot do things such as cutting trees, grashing, or taking or moving things. People are also warned not to speak rude, urinate and defecate there because these acts will offend the inhabitant spirits. The surrounding areas there are sacred and haunted places where people can find grass for the cattle or water for daily life.

## Discussion

As the locksmith, Mbah Maridjan has great influence towards the surrounding people whose majority of safety and prosperity depend on the nature. Many people assumed Mbah Maridjan as the top of local wisdom, because of his close relationship to Merapi Mountain. He is one of the Javanese who holds the myth. The myth states that there will be tremendous event every ten-year cycle, every age.

The submissiveness inspires the stubborn people to not be evacuated. Mbah Maridjan's fatwa regarding the eruption is more effective than the statement from the volcanologist. People of Pelemsari District believed that Mbah Maridjan had a vision in his dream. The vision implied that the village would be safe. Regarding the eruption, Mbah Maridjan is well-known for his ability to have visions and to understand the phenomena of Merapi Mountain. He is loyal to his duty as a locksmith. "Mbah Maridjan was able to see, to know, and understand the signs of nature, he would acknowledge whether the mountain's eruption would be dangerous or not". (Interview with Mr. Asih, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018, at Mr. Asih's house).

The perspective of Mbah Maridjan and other people regarding the danger of Merapi's eruption seems to be contradictive with the statement of volcanologist. It is not a sudden thing. In the Javanese Cosmology, especially in Yogyakarta, the existence of Merapi mountain and the Southern sea prop up the existence of Yogyakarta Palace in which the position is in the centre. In this case, people who live around Merapi Mountain would be more inclined to believe in the inherited cultures from ancestors than the academic perspective of a volcanologist. It makes the locksmith respected and an influence in all aspects of people's lives.

The character of people, which is full of symbols, is clearly seen when Mbah Maridjan explained things related to what happened with the Merapi Mountain. The Merapi, which is connected to the Southern Sea, becomes one of the imaginary axis' of the strength of Yogyakarta Palace. It is likened facing to the palace. The front side of the house is the Southern part of the mountain, that is the city of Yogyakarta.

It has been believed for years that Mbah Maridjan acted gently to the Merapi Mountain. The rituals and the activities he conducted were in respect to the things he was keeping and maintaining. To make the mountain patient, Mbah Maridjan took it away from people who are from the city, who underestimate the mountain "Merapi is a spirit, it can punish the greedy". (Interview with Mbah Harto, a nephew of Mbah Maridjan, one of inhabitants of Pelemsari, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018, at the house of Mbah Harto).

According to Mbah Harto, Mbah Maridjan acted based on culture. Behind his humble life, he is an open-minded and talkative wise person. The following are the activities that Mbah Maridjan did every year:

1) The Teaching of Labuhan Ceremony Ritual:

The ceremony of Labuhan was firstly conducted by Panembahan Senopati to be grateful for the life of the Mataram Empire and also to pray for the Sultan, King of Yogyakarta Palace and the people of Yogyakarta. If we want to understand this in depth, a series of Labuhan ceremonies in every 30 Rajab, explains us that the ceremony itself contains local wisdom that should be preserved and maintained. The first piece of local wisdom that we can gain from Labuhan of Merapi is that it is the synergy among nature, human, and plant in one harmony cooperation to keep the safety of the region.

**Picture 1.** Process of the Pray to Ask the Life-Safety



**Picture Source:** researcher's document, 2018

Second, giving the offerings in the process of prayer means there is an expectation that the spirits would share the same prayer with us, which is for the sake of Yogyakarta is people to be prosperous. The ceremony describes the existence of the good relationship between humans and the genies. There is a belief that genies existed to worship the God. This is in accordance with what is written in Al-Qur'an the 56 verse of Ad-Bariyat: "We do not create human and genie, other than to worship Me." Ibnu Katsir explains that this verse means that most important forms of worships such as prayer, expect, leave everything in God's hand, love and et cetera should be for the only one the God Almighty.

Third, Mr. Asih described that the prayer in the Labuhan ceremony has the meaning of expectation that the Merapi slope, especially the area of Cangkringan and Yogyakarta, would be safe and secure. “Although there would be turmoil/fluctuation of the eruption, Yogyakarta would be safe, fertile and secure”. It reveals the connection between human and The Creator.

Fourth, there would be the process of Khantil plantation during the Labuhan Ceremony. Mr. Asih explained that Kantil is the symbol of the close relationship of humans and nature. Fifth, the ceremony teaches us to be tolerant, to help each other, and to have the same dignity among humans. It is revealed by the fact that all people, young and old or man and woman, hike the mountain. They are orderly and reverently join the ceremony.

## 2) The teaching of Laku Topo Bisu Ritual

Merapi Mountain, based on the perspective of Mbah Maridjan, is the central world in the land of Java. Additionally, Merapi is a living mountain which is continuously bigger and changing. When it erupts, all people are required to pray to God for the sake of safety. This request has been made by Mbah Maridjan with the penance of walking around the sub-district of Kinahrejo three times, which is known as Topo Bisu.

**Picture 2.** The procession of Laku Topo Bisu



**Picture Source:** researcher’s document, 2018

Topo Bisu is a ritual conducted by walking around the district of Kinahrejo three times from Kinahrejo to KaliAdem, Ngrakah and re-enter through a gate in front of Umbulharjo’s village meeting hall. It is approximately five kilometres for one way, three times around would make

fifteen kilometres. People who join this ritual should not speak. An interviewee stated that “we are not allowed to eat, drink, smoke and other things. We should pray while walking. If we want to take a break, we remain stand up.” This ritual is conducted as a prayer to God to ask for security (Interview with Mas Gomet, young generation of Kinahrejo, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018 in the post of Jogja Lava Tour).

Mbah Msridjan is not an educated man. However, his wisdom as an elder is not because he is eighty years old, but because of his ‘vision’. It gives him a place as a role model for others. It is possible that Mbah Maridjan is the only public figure conducting rituals. Mr. Parewu Suraksuhargo, has lived with his families in the slope area of Merapi Mountain, that is Kinahrejo, Pelemsari, Umbulharjo Village, sub-district of Cangkringan, Sleman, Yogyakarta. Since he was born until he was 80 years old, Mbah Maridjan lived in the slope of Merapi Mountain. He felt an inner bond, that he is a part of Merapi. Culturally, he was fond of doing penance. He believed in the existence of spirits when the mountain started to erupt. Based on the books in Indonesia-Javanese, a locksmith is someone who has duty on keeping and maintaining something. As a locksmith, Mbah Maridjan was mandated by the Yogyakarta Palace to keep and maintain the Merapi.

Mbah Maridjan understands the job as a locksmith is like a ship captain. The captain will not leave the ship no matter what happens, he prefers to sink and die with the ship. In that context, Mbah Maridjan will not leave the Merapi Mountain when it starts to erupt. In his deep heart, Mbah Maridjan prefers to stay in the slope of Merapi to be exposed to the ash rather than ‘to escape’ from it. At a glance, identifying the figure of Mbah Maridjan, in the perspectives of cultural and traditional on him, we are going to possibly see a figure of Javanese man with his local wisdom.

The process of knowing and recognizing the Merapi has been far away. Mbah Maridjan was born and raised in Merapi. From his father, Panewu Suraksuhargo, Mbah Maridjan inherited the position of the locksmith. For more than 20 years, he has become a court retainer of Yogyakarta Palace and served as a locksmith of Merapi Mountain.

The struggle with Merapi Mountain goes far back in time. Since he was a child, he has lived in the Merapi’s slope, learning about the local wisdom from his father and to face the mountain’s activities. Along this journey, almost his entire lifetime, he learned to identify natural symptoms related to the activities of Merapi, and to understand “Merapi’s expectation” which never stops ‘to give’ with never stops to do the penance life.

Mbah Maridjan often did penance in his life, asking for security for all. Everyone should do the penance life, not only for the ones who live around Merapi Mountain, but for all people of Yogyakarta. As a locksmith, Mbah Maridjan was appointed by the Sultan to be the elder, leader

of traditional ceremonies, and to visualize and report the Merapi's activities. Mbah Maridjan was often connected to the world of heresy because of his rituals. Mbah Maridjan prayed to God in traditional manners, which still cannot be explained in logic. Some people may think it as heresy.

The habit of Mbah Maridjan, since the level 4 of Merapi Mountain, was Puasa Mutih (fasting from the daily foods, only having rice, water, and his favourite of white cigarettes. Having the meditation in his house, in Paseban Sri Manganti (located in Post I Merapi Mountain), or in Paseban Labuhan Dalem (post II) every 1<sup>st</sup> Rejeb Saka Year. He did this together with some court retainers of Yogyakarta Palace. This ritual was sometimes conducted with some nature lovers and some inhabitants. The prayer is for Eyang Empu Romo, Eyang Empu Permadi, Eyang Panembahan Sapu Jagat (was known as Kyai Sapu Jagat), and all figures living in Merapi Mountain. Additionally, every corner of his house is full of sacred things, such as the photograph of Sultan Hamengkubuwono X, Java-Islam calendar, the photo of Merapi Mountain. However, Mbah Maridjan always conducted Muslim prayers 5 times a day in the mosque he built near his house.

For Mbah Maridjan, Merapi is a sacred thing which takes breath, and has thoughts, and feelings. Do not say rude words to it, as Mbah Maridjan always warns us. When the Merapi starts to erupt, he believes that the sacred spirit is angry. When it starts to angry, Merapi gives the signs to humans. The angry of the spirit was defined by Mbah Maridjan as the sign that human is greedy (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> Januari 2016, in Mr. Asih's house).

According to Mbah Maridjan, in Merapi Mountain, there are some figures are ruling. These are Eyang Empu Romo, Eyang Empu Permadi and Eyang Panembahan Sapu Jagat. There is a relationship to keep and protect each other. When a party does something, the other will remind and give a sign. When Merapi starts to erupt, he will remind others, including Mbah Maridjan. When he has a need, everybody should be patient and leave everything to the God's hand. (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018, in Mr. Asih's house).

Through the symbolization of cleaning the slope of Merapi Mountain, Mbah Maridjan wanted to warn and suggest everybody to clean their hearts and not to do bad things. He wanted the people who mine the sand using machines to stop in order not to break the nature of Merapi. He has asked people to stop exploiting the nature. When the spirit of Merapi starts to get angry, there is always danger in the Southern part. To make us secure, do not harm nature. The eruption can direct toward the expected place, this village will not be exposed by the ash clouds and people would certainly be saved. (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018, in Mr. Asih's house). "Inside the ketupat, Mbah Maridjan asked to be filled with salt and the betel leaf. The symbolic meaning, the betel leaf means the symbol of Merapi and salt means the

Southern Sea. In the perspective of supernatural, these two are the spiritual power of Yogyakarta Palace” (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018, in Mr. Asih’s house).

Mbah Maridjan is the figure who is connected to nature and understands the signs of nature including: rain, landslide, fall of lava, the shrinking water during the hot season, and also the pests. Planting quinine has been the habit until now. This is why the place is called Kinahrejo (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018, in Mr. Asih’s house). Although the house is located on the top of the mountain in the district of Pelemsari, Cangkringan, Sleman, as the court retainer, Mbah Maridjan always visits the Palace. He visits at least twice a year, after the Idul Fitri and after the Labuhan. The younger generation like to talk to Mbah Maridjan because of his funny thoughts that seemlogically backward and his wisdom. The heart is full of wisdom (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> Januari 2018, in Mr. Asih’s house).

His work as a locksmith gives him very little money to live. The monthly payment does not always cover all needs. To take the salary, Mbah Maridjan needs to go to the city which is around 28 kilometres away. He lives with his spirit of a simple life, even the spirit to fasting. His happiness is to serve the Yogyakarta Palace until he dies. (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018, in Mr. Asih’s house).

### ***The Dream of Mbah Maridjan***

“In November 1994 my parents visited me, in fact they are my grandparents. With them, there was a tall handsome man. He said ‘we have arta (money in Javanese). Please give it to all! It does not mean literally, arta means warta (news). He warned that Merapi Mountain would be dangerous. In the following day, at 10 a.m there was an eruption. I was in the slope areas, fixing the path for the Labuhan. In front of me there were ash clouds. I prayed to God: Assalamualaikum. Suddenly there was wind blowing and escapes the clouds. Praise the God.” (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> Januari 2018, at 15.30 in Mr. Asih’s house).

“There were various stories . There was a sign from a doctor about the forecast of the Merapi. It was written in the newspaper that the place would be cleaned, everyone should be moved. Then, I wrote a letter to the Sultan and asked for the order not to move, no one would move use from this place. The Sultan agreed, and asked Mbah Maridjan not to move until he is told to do so by the Sultan” (Interview with Mr. Asih, Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> Januari 2018, in Mr. Asih’s house).

People of Cangkringan believe in the fate. The death, losing things, and sickness due to the eruption of Merapi is fate. It is understandable when there is eruption, Merapi is having a celebration. The close relationship to Merapi based on the experience, knowledge, respect would generate sustainable nature and culture of people of Merapi.



To understand the Myth of Merapi cannot be separated from the philosophy of Yogyakarta Palace. This city is separated by the imaginary axis of Laut Kidul, parangkusumo, panggung Krapyak, Yogyakarta Palace, Tugu Yogyakarta and Merapi. Philosophically, it is divided into two: the small world and the big world. The small world takes care of the cycle of life, from the birth until the death. The big world regulates the spirits which would be in the Southern Sea or in Merapi.

### **Conclusion**

Mbah Maridjan is a court retainer of Yogyakarta Palace, he was appointed as the locksmith of Merapi. He was assumed as an elder and source of the local wisdom due to his simple life, beliefs, and determination . In his life-time, Mbah Maridjan planted quinine due to its ability to hold the lava fall. Mbah Maridjan also defended the land of Merapi' slope area against being developed into a golf course. It is believed that the area is very much sacred.

The charisma of Mbah Maridjan is mostly influenced by the legitimating of Yogyakarta Palace. It is believed that the Palace is the place to ask and pray for harmony and balance. The structure of Cangkringan people is still traditional. The inherited culture is still dominant compared to the statement of vulcanologists.

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