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*Discoursing Disaster: Power and Actor of the Lapindo Case in Indonesia*

presented by  
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“Wherever I found a living creature, there I found the will to power.”

- Friedrich Nietzsche

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## Preface

Focusing on a plethora of statements articulated by interrelated actors concerning the unnatural Lapindo mudflow in the region of Porong, East Java, Indonesia, this study explores how these actors have been enlivening and reviving the discourse of “disaster” following the hazard. The data of this study is gathered from a multifaceted research, especially the fieldwork within a disaster victim community that I conducted in 2009, 2010, 2012, and 2013 and a series of critical readings into media reportages, journal articles, and memories of the incident.

Inspired by Michel Foucault’s discourse theory and analysis, this study aims to unravel power relations that have been generating the dynamic of the society by focusing on the “statements” stored and articulated by particular actors in various discursive fields. It is somewhat ethnography of conflicting and competing statements about what happened, the statements I collected during these periods of research have led me to a focal subject discussed in this dissertation, the relation of power and actor in the course of the disaster.

I found that the mudflow has put particular actors in competing and therefore escalating power relations since each party has their own version of truth and been struggling to defend their claim and decline the others’ claim. Power relation between these actors has been escalation owing to public’s blame on the reckless drilling of an oil and natural gas company, Lapindo Brantas, has initiated the mudflow. It is very much predicted that the company is using its political and economic resources to limit or reduce its liability for causing such a calamity to the society and ecology and to such a purpose it has been colluded with the Indonesian government. In the course of the research, I found that much information has been manipulated by the collusion in order to steer public opinion from “industrial disaster” to “natural disaster” and as a result an unequal power relation between the collusion and mudflow victims has been characterizing the disaster since the beginning. To that end, throughout the chapters of this study I want to defend an argument saying that

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to some extent the mudflow and disaster resulted from it are indeed anthropogenic and what happen afterwards is just efforts of certain actors to prove or deny it.

I am very much concerned with the issue of by problematizing of natural disaster claim over the mudflow and relating it with the notion of power has made me another actor of the disaster.

Some parts of Chapter 1 have been published in “Mediating the victims: The role of an intellectual in the ‘Lapindo Case’,” *EthnoScripts*, 15(2), 131-147. Some parts of Chapter 3 have been presented as a paper entitled “The culture of mitigation politics in Indonesia: Lessons from mud-volcano disaster mitigation in East Java” and discussed in 2<sup>nd</sup> Earth Resilience Symposium, Berlin (2-3 March 2013). Some parts of Chapter 4 have been published (in Bahasa Indonesia) in “Kasus Lapindo oleh Media Arus Utama” in *Membingkai Lapindo: Pendekatan Konstruksi Sosial atas Kasus Lapindo (Sebuah Bunga Rampai)* edited by A. Novenanto, 93-115. Jakarta & Yogyakarta: MediaLink & Kanisius. Some main findings and arguments have been presented as a paper entitled “Environmental Disaster as Cultural Heritage” and discussed in “The Resilience of Vernacular Heritage in Asian Cities” Conference, organized by Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore (6-7 November 2014).



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## Chapter 1 | Introduction

### 1.1. Drown in effigy

The morning of May 29, 2013, I observed hundreds of Lapindo mudflow victims gathered in the Porong Square. They were preparing a march along the Porong highway from the square to the western embankment as a series of the seventh-year commemoration of the mud eruption. In the course of the rally, a victims' coordinator orated his concerns about recent conditions of the victims using a mobile sound system on a truck so that more people could hear it. He was the only person who spoke during the rally. He did not give anyone else a chance to take over the microphone from his hand.

The speech was full of statements claiming that the main problem of the disaster was due to the government's negligence to what has been and is happening. Instead of punishing Lapindo Brantas (the company blamed for triggering the mudflow; henceforth, "Lapindo"), the government has been protecting it. Such an attitude has been, according to him, forsaking victims' actual needs. Yet the speech was describing the past and present condition of the victims as well as delivering what would happen to Porong if such continues to occur. Jumped into a macro social context, he blamed the greedy mining companies in the country for bringing a devastating catastrophe to the society. Even more, he claimed that the government has hitherto been controlled by those corporations.

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To date the government has been negligent. The government has been neglecting the Lapindo case which will put an end to the Porong region and its people. [...] The government has been absent in this case. Lapindo is out of control and it will drill again. We refuse the drilling. We refuse mining in this country. Mining will be devastating. It will empower corporations. Corporations to which the government has to comply are now controlling Indonesia.<sup>1</sup>

The oration was indeed full of criticism, but the most interesting, attractive, eye-catching object of that day procession was a giant puppet or an “*ogoh-ogoh*” (as the locals called it) of a male figure wearing a yellow suit, carrying a briefcase full of money and sitting on a mud-volcano. The *ogoh-ogoh* was meant to be an effigy of Aburizal Bakrie, a leading figure of the Bakrie family, Lapindo’s holding company. The yellow color was meant as the color of the Golkar Party (*Partai Golkar*) in which Aburizal was acting as the chairperson.

According to my personal communications with Cak Irsyad from Sanggar Alfaz (see 1.8 below) a few days before the commemoration, the making of the *ogoh-ogoh* was inspired by a Balinese tradition a few days ahead of Nyepi (the first day of the Balinese New Year). The ritual, according to him, aims to cleanse the communities of evil spirits when they enter a new year. Nowadays, in addition to make effigies of mythological creatures (ogres or demons), the Balinese also creatively create some figures of the real life, which are deemed to be giving bad influences for the life of communities. The climax of the procession is the burning down of the effigy to ashes as a symbol of the cleansing of the village of evil spirits and bad lucks. Adopting such an idea, the

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<sup>1</sup> My own translation of the oration, cited from a video recording of the rally (May 29, 2013).

mudflow victims led by Irsyad made an effigy of Aburizal for they saw him as the evil spirit who has brought nothing but miseries and sufferings to the people in Porong. The procession that day ended with a finale of victims escorting the effigy to the edge of the embankment and throwing it into the mud lake. It meant to as of Aburizal drowned in effigy into the mud their disaster-related problems would end too. In the course of the drowning, Irsyad leading the procession yelled to the crowd:

Dear all friends, our intention is to remove destruction. This [throwing the effigy to the mud] is a sign of throwing our misfortunes, made by [Aburizal] Bakrie. We dispose misfortunes.<sup>2</sup>



*Fig. 1.1 Drown in effigy (Photo courtesy of Lutfi Amiruddin, 2013)*

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<sup>2</sup> My own translation of the oration, cited from a video recording of the rally (May 29, 2013).

The chapters that follow aim to describe sociocultural contexts that make the procession on that day possible, the contexts that provide the victims of Lapindo mudflow the reason and freedom to assemble and articulate particular statements and be resistant to some others. In doing so, this study addresses how different interpretations toward an industrial disaster in Indonesia have been produced, reproduced, maintained, and to some extent competed by particular actors. Focusing on the produced and circulated statements concerning the mudflow origin, it investigates the role of power on human actors such processes.

Generally speaking, disaster victims are frequently perceived as powerless due to the physical and mental sufferings they experience following environmental hazards. These victims not only have to lose time, energy, and materials due to the hazards, but they also must recover and pursuit all the backwardness. This study, on the contrary, argues that disaster victims are not as powerless as many people see them. Calling from Foucault's discourse theory and analysis, this study aims to show how these people are actually very creative in inventing own agency to compete in the battle of social construction of the disaster through ongoing power relations with other actors. Power relations are a key concept to critically understand how certain actors maintain the discursiveness of the disaster in various discursive fields. Relying on the data gathered from a series of critical discourse analyses into various statements regarding the mudflow, each chapter of this study is concerned with the notion of freedom in relation to how different actors deal with the social and ecological crisis resulting from such a hazardous environmental

force. The sections that follow in this chapter aim to argue of how and why such a focus is important and necessary to be done.

## **1.2. Framing the problems**

In the first place, I was very much interested in studying the media construction concerning the Lapindo case by addressing on the question of how political and economic forces influence media workers in representing the disaster to broader audience through their mass-mediated outlets of information. Anthropologists have noted crucial problems on studying media, that is, the production of meaning and ideology in the mass communication process, and the process of interpretation. While, at the same time, media are economically and politically driven and linked to the development of science and technology (Spitulnik 1993). In many situations, anthropologists and journalists have become the person who introduce and train indigenous people to using media technologies along with the fact that they have become affordable, more user-friendly, and accessible to these people. In fact, people do not only learn how to use media technologies but also how to frame certain facts, perform them, and represent themselves for public consumption. Only by this the concern of the socially, culturally, and politically marginalized people can be heard by a larger audience.

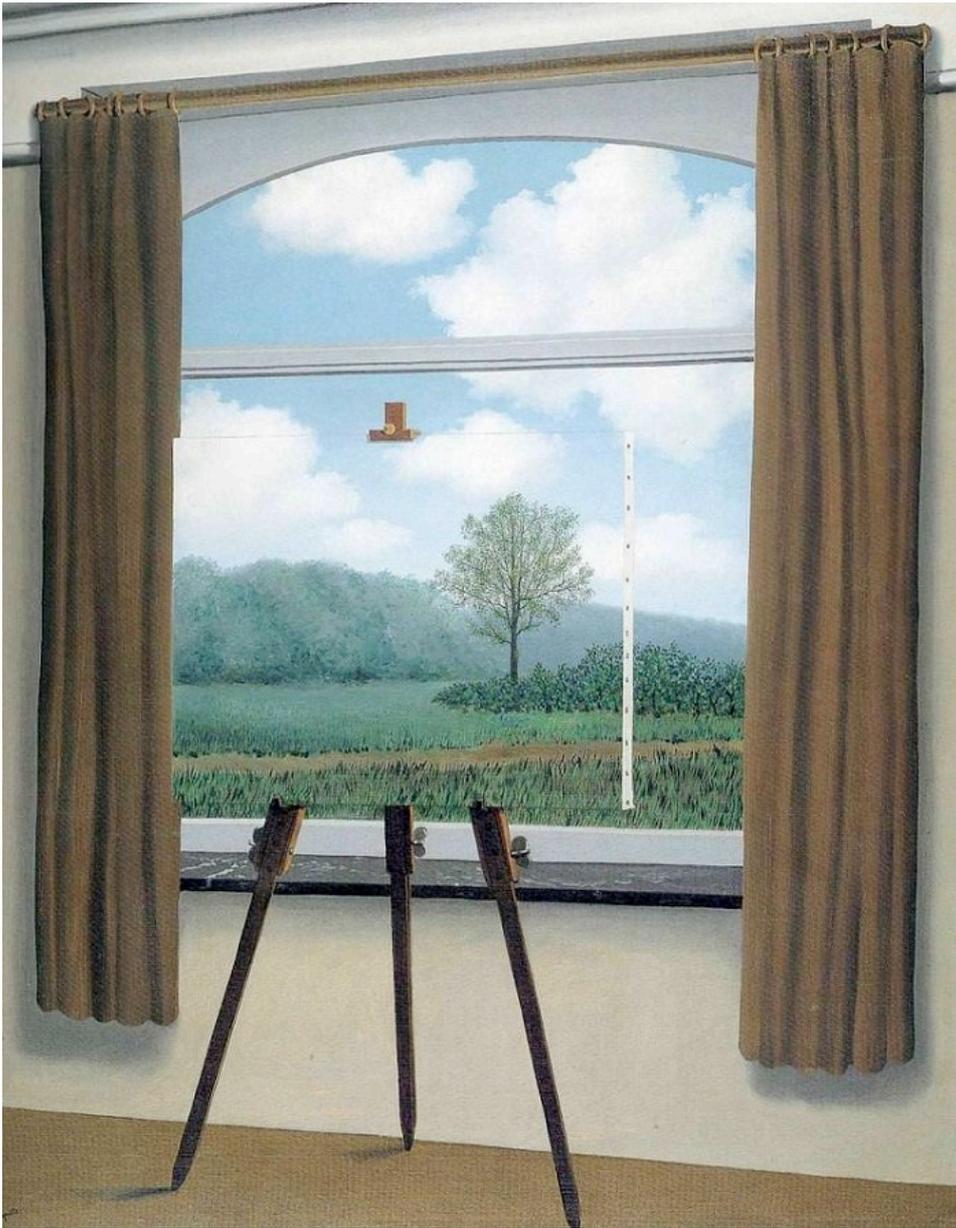
In the course of my research, the question of media, which is still a central issue that will be discussed in chapter 4, has expanded beyond and reached other discursive fields in which statements about the disaster were detected. One main consideration is following sociologist John Hannigan who argues

that aside from “the media,” where claims of environmental problems are (re)presented and morally valued, there are two other institutions that are also important in the whole process of social construction of such problems (Hannigan 2006). Those two are “science,” where scientific claims concerning the nature are fabricated, and “politics,” where environmental-related claims are contested (Hannigan 2006, 64–66). This suggests that in order to grasp a broader, better understanding of power competitions in the course of an environmental issue, one should go beyond media construction and expand to an analysis of scientific and political constructions of the issue. Another theoretical consideration of the enlargement of the focus of this study to go beyond just the question of media construction is a thought that rather than being the source of information the media only reproduce information media workers gathered and processed from many sources, such as scientists, government officials, and politicians, to explain and clarify the incident. Indeed, media news is a result of highly intense negotiations between media workers and their informants (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1989) while publics function media news as a “window to see the world” (Tuchman 1978).

“Bad news is good news” has been the unwritten law of media and disaster stories always receive a great amount of public attentions. According to a 1973 survey conducted by American Newspaper Publishers Association, “accidents and disasters” were read by 39 percent of the readers, which was the highest rate compared to that of political news (25 percent) and general/non-local/human interest news (25 percent) (in Sood, Stockdale, and Rogers 1987). Disasters are therefore always economically beneficial for the

media industry because the more people are curious to know about them the more media are consumed. Disasters are newsworthy, a facticity. However, mass-mediated reality is resulted from a series of practices of framing and reframing certain facts in a certain system of meaning (Gamson et al. 1992). The media are not just plain windows and news is not only merely a story; they are also discourses constructed within a competed negotiation of several actors—media workers and their sources—to frame certain facts based on their interests. On the relation of power and framing, sociologist Erving Goffman once argues “the very vulnerability of the framing process makes it a locus of potential struggle, not a leaden reality to which we all inevitably must yield” (cited in Gamson et al. 1992). However, the act of framing is also performed by media informants and audiences (Scheufele 1999). On the top of that is the argument that the circulation of information is never a linear, close-ended but rather a circular, floating, and never-ending process. It is not about the production, but rather the reproduction of knowledge and therefore of truth through framing (and reframing) certain statements in accordance to certain political agendas of various actors who have interested in the topic.

The act of framing is reminiscent of a painting by Belgian artist René Magritte, *The Human Condition* (1933). It frames a view from inside a room looking out the outer landscape through a window (Fig. 1.2).



*Fig. 1.2 Rene Magritte's The Human Condition (1933)*  
(source: <http://www.renemagritte.org/images/paintings/the-human-condition.jpg>)

What is intriguing about the painting is the emplacement of a painting within the painting. Located in the front of the window the within painting is seen as if it is a complementary part of the outer landscape. It frames viewers' perception of what is happening in the outside. Of course, the viewer will have a framed perception of beautiful scenery of a pathway, a tree, bushes, a green hill, white clouds and a blue sky, as represented by the within painting. Yet it

makes viewers would never know what actually, recently happens outside the window. It is very likely that what exists after the painting finished to be different from what the framing offers. It is not to say that the artist is lying about the outer landscape, but what if the tree is no more? What if, on the contrary, there are more trees? What if the hill is flattened to the ground? What if there is built a new house there? What if the within painting is not representing the truth about the outer landscape? What if there is another hidden alternative of the within painting, about which only the painter knows? We can add more critical questions concerning what is happening out there but we are just viewers inside the room and our knowledge of the outer landscape has been framed by the already-painted landscape. We are only viewers with no opportunity to ask of whether the whole painting is true.

### **1.3. The politics of truth**

In many cases, there is a possibility for different actors have different, oppositional frames regarding a same issue, including the Lapindo case in Indonesia. Although it is very difficult to alter one's framing, there is a possibility for framing alteration, like in the case of how the Indonesian government's attitude toward the Lapindo mudflow has been shifted in sequences from "industrial accident" to "natural phenomenon" (chapter 3). However, some scholars note that nowadays the framing of the disaster has become more fixed and unchangeable than before (Batubara 2013; Drake 2013). On the one hand, there is industrial disaster framing and on the other, there is natural disaster framing. In the course of my research, I discovered that

these different framings have been coloring the competition of production and reproduction of knowledge regarding the event. It is then very easy to associate the “natural disaster” framing to Lapindo and the government and the “industrial disaster” framing to disaster victims and critical public in general (Drake 2013). These competitive frames have situated these actors in ongoing, conflicting power relations and because different interpretations of the disaster may imply different consequences conflicts and fights over the production and reproduction of knowledge concerning the disaster and therefore power competitions performed by different actors escalate significantly.

In the course of the fieldwork, I was amazed to find the insistence of many people utilizing the term *lumpur Lapindo* (meaning, “Lapindo mud/mudflow”) to name the mudflow event/process in Porong, East Java after the accused company and therefore to blame it for causing such a catastrophe. According to my archival readings of early media reportages concerning the mudflow, I found the term had been circulating from the very beginning of the eruption (late-May 2006) and became very popular in the media and everyday lives. Nowadays, it is the most spontaneously used term in everyday talks in and beyond Porong and an understanding of an anthropogenic mudflow has been dominating public opinion and precipitating into a truth shared not only by my interlocutors and informants but also by the Indonesian public in general (Mudhoffir 2013).

However, I am noticing that many experts, scientists and government officials are very much aware of the political consequences in using the term. They view the term *lumpur Lapindo* to be paramount to blame the company

and, to them, blaming is unethical since it will only raise conflict instead of harmony which parallels to the Javanese philosophy of maintaining harmony (see Magnis-Suseno 1981). For this reason, they have been intentionally avoiding the using of such a term. As a replacement, they favor another term, *lumpur Sidoarjo* (meaning, “Sidoarjo mud/mudflow”), which is taken from the name of the regency where the hazard is located. They argued that the disaster’s name should refer to the location instead of other attributions (see also 4.6). Accordingly, these people have been proclaiming to be neutral, objective and apolitical in finding solutions to the problems resulting from the mudflow for they did not want to involve and add further political intrigues. Nonetheless, instead of being neutral and non-political, the insistence for the name *lumpur Sidoarjo* has been another enforcement of power for it has been very functional in, at least, three simultaneously ways: to replace the prevalent utilization of *lumpur Lapindo* in society, to erase publics’ memories of the company in the event/process and, the most problematic, to insinuate the idea that the mudflow is just another regular natural phenomenon.

As a result, only by looking the term at which each actor has been consistently using regarding the incident one can easily see his/her alignment. If the actor is insisting to use the term *lumpur Lapindo*, he/she has a tendency to stand in the camp of anthropogenic disaster. On the contrary, if the actor is disturbed by the term and resolute for a more neutral term (i.e., *lumpur Sidoarjo*), he/she will very likely to be twisted as one proponent of the natural disaster camp. Above all, both terms—*lumpur Lapindo* and *lumpur Sidoarjo*—have been very practical for the analysis of power competition over the

mudflow disaster. Such is a starting point to explain the discursiveness of the disaster that happens to be the main focus of this present study.

As for framing may offer a totally different reality, a critical inquiry emphasizing on framing more than just an explanation of the reality represented is needed and therefore an examination of framing beyond just the question of the reality being framed is very crucial. Framing is political in the sense that it is a simultaneous act to include some facts and excluding some others. The articulation and distribution of certain framings has become another power practice consisting of power competition, yet one cannot predict the impact of such on other people. Therefore, one should step forward to address the social and cultural tensions behind the framing process, the authorities to legitimate and distribute certain framings, and the effect of framing to the framers and their intended viewers. Framing is a practice of power and problems with such are always rooted in the question of power within the truth claims, the main concern this study deals with.

To that end, epistemological and ethical concerns strike in the process of research and writing of this present study. Which argument about the origin of the mudflow should I accept for this study? Do I have to follow the argument that the mudflow is just another natural disaster, like many experts, scientists, and government officials? Or, do I acknowledge the idea that the disaster is a man-made, anthropogenic following the understanding of my interlocutors and informants?

I began my research with a position that this study was not designed to find which argument is the most correct but rather to focus on power relations

between certain actors in building and unfolding others' truth claims of the disaster. To collect information in participant observation and to reflect these particular data in a theoretical framework are indeed core competences of anthropology, but doing a research on environmental disaster related to industrial activity is always problematic. Anthropologist Gregory Button argues such a study is about collecting incomplete and conflicting information, or even more "uncertainties" (Button 2010, 11). Button observes:

whether labeled "natural" or "unnatural" disasters highlight the asymmetrical distribution of power and foreground of the struggle of the state, corporation, and human agency for the redistribution of power. *The control of information in public discourse, as well as the attempt to control the social production of meaning, is an attempt to define reality.* (Button 2010, 16, emphasis added)

Although each party (e.g., government officials, experts, company representatives, victims, activists, media workers, and many more) has their own version of truth that may escalate the level of uncertainty spreading within the society, in the course of research I discovered unequal power relations between the collusion between the company and the government, on the one hand, and the victims, on the other, characterizing the mudflow disaster (cf. Drake 2013). Based on my ethnographic fieldwork and media content analysis, I found that much information about the mudflow origin was manipulated by company's representatives (see 4.5) and it is very much predicted that the accused corporation will be using its political and economic resources to limit or reduce its liability for causing such a calamity (Schiller, Lucas, and

Sulistiyanto 2008). The government, as many of my victim-informants told me about, does not seem to have sovereignty in its decision concerning the corporation. Even more, it tends to protect and legitimize corporate's actions responding the mudflow, as the oration cited at the outset of the chapter. The victims, as citizens of a country, never get certainty from the government concerning the mitigation and risk reduction of the hazard and this has become another disaster for the victims (see 2.6 & 3.7). While this situation creates public confusion concerning the Lapindo case (cf. Lim 2013), I observed that the confusion has been deliberately created in order to weaken public criticism against Lapindo for causing the mudflow (see 4.6). Thus, throughout the chapters of this study I want to defend an argument by saying that to some extent the mudflow hazard and the disaster that follows it are anthropogenic and what happen afterwards are just efforts of certain actors to prove or deny it. Therefore, the study aims to problematize various claims of "natural disaster" over the mudflow by relating it with the notions of power and actor.

#### **1.4. Truth, power, and discourse**

One theorist who has been very critical to the politics of truth is French philosopher Michel Foucault from whom the inspiration of this study comes. To Foucault,

*Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and*

instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault 1980, 131, emphasis added)

Following the passage, Foucault suggests that it is better for us to critically perceive “truths” as nothing but “truth claims” shaped by a timely, contextual “régime of truth.” The régime provides particular actors in certain times and contexts a series code of conducts in accepting some statements to be true and some others from consideration to be true. Truth claims should be then understood as discourses produced by human actors and producing power effects in relation to humans’ freedom to accept or deny them. Although power has been central in Foucault’s seminal works, it was not his intention to coin a new theory of power. He however does not view it constantly in a negative way that power is about how one exploits other humans like preceding theorists of power, especially German sociologist Max Weber.

According to Eric Wolf, Weber views power as “the ability of an *ego* to impose its will to social action upon an *alter*” (Wolf 1999, 4–6). Such a conception has a great influence in the U.S. in the 1960s, especially in the work of American political scientist Robert Dahl (Lukes 2005). Dahl suggests power should be understood as “relationships” between “individuals, groups, roles, offices, government, nation-states, or other human aggregates” (Dahl 1957, 203). He describes power as “something like this: A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do”

(Dahl 1957, 202–203). Criticizing Dahl, British political sociologist Steven Lukes proposes a more “radical” theory of power as for he defines it as a social relation of “A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B’s interest” (Lukes 2005, 37). Following this, Lukes suggests an investigation of power by considering decision-making processes, in which “direct” conflicts of subjective interests are handled and resolved in order to draw a single, firm decision.

All in all, many theorists suggest examination of power through a series analysis of power relations, that is, either domination or hegemony of one or some actors (the winner) over other actor(s) (the loser). This is not what power means to Foucault, because he argues that power exists because of freedom of which, according to preceding theorists, applies only to the dominator and not to the dominated. According to Foucault, the freedom of each actor is fundamental in every power relation as he argues, “power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault 1978, 93). To him, power is not something that can be possessed, transmitted, or dispossessed by particular actors or localized in certain material objects. It is because power is somewhat that all actors—even the seemingly “powerless” one, such as disaster victims—have access to and therefore they have the freedom to compel or resist it (cf. Downing 2008, 90).

Relying on such a conception, power has never been localized in some governmental apparatuses or some modalities. To Foucault, power is omnipresent and can be detected in power relations between human actors, the subjects of the social world. As such, one can easily sense the existence of

power through interactive, sometimes even conflictive, power relations (Foucault 1978, 94). An analysis of power should be done through an investigation of power relations and only by this power can be seen as not always exploiting humans. Furthermore, one can argue for a prolific function of power governing human actions in generating dynamics of a society through a series of on-going power relations. Foucault's conception of power is very much influenced by German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and therefore it is necessary for us to discuss what it means to Nietzsche and how such meaning influences Foucault in discussing the relation between truth claims and power in his seminal works.

Political scientist Martin Saar suggests the using of three-dimension psychoanalytical view of forms of power to ease our understanding of what power means to Nietzsche (Saar 2010, 457–460). The first dimension is “real power” which refers to the capacity for violence exercised by “the powerful,” “the masters,” “the riches,” “the owners,” “those in command” (Nietzsche 2009, 18). Power relations resulted from this kind of power is domination (“power over”) and corresponds with Weber's theory of power (i.e., the capability of someone to control others to do according to his/her will). Additionally, Marxist theory of power is constructed from the idea that some people have accessibility to certain material basis (“modes of production”) in a society and for this reason they can dominate other people to do what they want.

A second dimension is “symbolic power” which is performed through the creation of meanings. By this Saar was referring to Nietzsche's idea of

hegemonic power performed by ascetic priests over members of a society by providing them a full package of moral, religious values (Saar 2010, 458; cf. Nietzsche 2009, 22). Living in a so-called modern, scientific era, one can add “scientists” as another ascetics to perform such hegemony through the production of scientific claims, especially when dealing with rational, modern explanation of nature and natural phenomena (Latour 2004). This, of course, rehashes Nietzsche’s very question of who gives these actors the authority to define something or someone to the society. It is a question that brings about an understanding of a third dimension of power, “imaginary power,” which has been immanent in Foucault’s seminal study on the relation between power and knowledge (Saar 2010, 459). By imaginary, it does not mean that this kind of power is a non-real or perhaps fictive concept. On the contrary, it stimulates feeling of power (over), constitutes subjects, and therefore fashions knowledge production. According to Saar, this is “the power that works *on* and *in* subjects themselves, that is part of their physic setup, nothing external to them” (Saar 2010, 462, emphasis original) and this so-called Nietzsche’s conception of “will to power,” according to him, has been driving actors to produce, reproduce, and fight for what they claim to be true.

Foucault elaborates the idea of “will to power” from Nietzsche by problematizing actors’ “will to truth” through a series of critical discourse analysis into human knowledge. To Foucault, critique is a “movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question the truth on its effects of power and question power on its discourses of truth” (Foucault 2007, 47). Claims for an objective truth are nothing but discourses circulating, competed, and

generating the dynamics within a society. This is one reason of Foucault relating power into a discussion of the politics of truth which makes his critique is aimed not onto the search for the truest statements but rather to break down political strategies of a truth claiming (Rajchman 2007). What is typical in Foucault's theorization of discourse then is a focus of study centering less on the statements articulated than on the structural power that has been shaping and reshaping the articulation and silence of certain statements by the society.

As for Foucault relates discourse to power, he receives reactions from other scholars and among them has been German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas, one proponent of modernism. Habermas criticizes Foucault for failing "to deal with the persistent problems that come up in connection with an interpretive approach to the object domain, a self-referential denial of universal validity claims, and a normative justification for critique" (Habermas 1985, 286). For this reason, he accuses him for delivering a serious threat to the philosophical discourse of modernity and therefore destabilizing all preexisting systems of meaning, validity and value "not only on the metatheoretical, but on the empirical level as well" (Habermas 1985, 286).

In delivering the critique to Foucault, Habermas is idealizing a critical theory that is capable to cleanse critique of power. The purification of critique has been a focal concern of the Frankfurt School's critical theory in which he is not only a successor but also a prominent reform of the tradition. Similar to his mentors, he argues that Weber to have failed in developing an ideal theory of rational action for the "purposive-rational action" cannot free humans from exploitation made by reason (Habermas 1989). But, unlike his predecessors

who were trapped in the irrationality of human reason, in correcting such a failure, Habermas proposes a new theory of communicative action with which humans feels liberated from the exploiting power of reason because it is grounded on “consensual norms” between interactants, not by exploiting them (Habermas 1989, 92). In so doing, he is continuing a modernist agenda by insisting for an “ideal” critique, the critique that has been purified from interests and power and played out by equal interactants. Thus, in the process of developing his discourse theory, Habermas has been guided by the realm of a power-free discourse, the realm that is less concrete than a utopia.

Foucault’s approach to discourse, on the contrary, has been more contextual and radical than Habermas’s for he views that rather than being universals human reason is always rooted and situated in certain historical and social contexts. Instead of perceiving and continuing modernist idea of cleansing discourse of power, Foucault observes, “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault 1978, 101). By this, he is more concerned with a struggle to dismantle the governing power resulted in discourses and the power effects resulting from them. To him, power is inherent within discourses and therefore it would seem nonsense for any effort to separate power off discourses. This is naturally very different from Habermasian theory of discourse because according to Habermas discourse is meant to a search for consensual agreements of certain reasonable argumentations among interactants, while Foucault views it as something they have to struggle with—through acceptance and/or rejection—for practical,

contextual or timely purposes. All in all, Foucault's theorization of discourse is offering a theoretical underpinning to conduct a critical discourse analysis by looking not only at the statements articulated but also at the historical and social contexts of how such statements articulated or silenced by human actors.

### **1.5. The unnaturalness of natural disaster**

In a recent book *The Culture of Disaster*, Marie-Hélène Huet does a radical analysis in explaining the link between environmental disasters that happened in the eighteenth century and the Enlightenment movement in Europe. She argues in a condense paragraph:

The eighteenth-century philosophers made a lasting contribution to a modern understanding of disaster by sweeping away the divine explanation of human wreckage to seek among human alone the cause of human ills and in nature alone the cause of physical chaos. (Huet 2012, 7)

She concludes that “disaster narrative always combines efforts to express the shattering of lives with the desire to assign human responsibility” (Huet 2012, 158). In line with other scholars of disasters (e.g., Rozario 2007; Zack 2009), Huet notes the 1755 Lisbon earthquake as the most prominent natural hazard in the history of Western “rational” thinking towards environmental disasters for the earthquake emerged a human-centered perspective to open for unnatural causes of natural disasters—in contrary to the religious (Christian) view on disaster as an “act of God.”

For it occurred on All Saints' Day (November 1), the Lisbon earthquake raised difficult questions for Christians: why would God send suffering to the

innocent on such a day? Although there are still many disagreements about what is the core idea of the Enlightenment, yet one thing for sure it challenges religious (Christian) beliefs in explaining, especially natural phenomena and contest them with scientific, empirical rationalizations. And, as for the earthquake happened at the time when the movement began to spark, a “modern” perspective to find the relationship between natural hazards, development, and disasters began to develop. The Lisbon earthquake was, according to Huet, not just a starting point of human efforts to dismiss supernatural causes of natural disasters and their reattribution as purely natural phenomena, but also the beginning of a history of the politicization of disasters, “the emancipation of disasters from nature to the *socius*” (Huet 2012, 8).

Many Enlightenment thinkers at the time tried to find a more rational, *vis-à-vis* religious, explanations for the earthquake. While many took it for granted that Voltaire’s poem was meant to say the earthquake as literary an “act of God” (Rozario 2007, 15–16), Voltaire was in the position of using the earthquake to attack Leibniz’s theodicy and simultaneously proposing that the taking care of the injured and rebuilding the city in the aftermath of the disaster as the government’s responsibility (Dynes 2000, 110–112; Huet 2012, 51). In his response to Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau proposed the first sociocultural explanation toward “natural” disaster by emphasizing that the suffering was a result of the miscalculation of risk management in urban development in the city of Lisbon, which is now known as “vulnerability” (Dynes 2000, 106, 111). Rousseau also presumed that the victims were more

concerned about their possessions than saving lives as the earth began to shake (Zack 2009, 3) to say that God does not need to be rescued but man does (Huet 2012, 52). Therefore, to Rousseau, disaster is a social and cultural phenomenon in relation to extreme changes of nature resulting in sufferings to human populations. Later on, German philosopher Immanuel Kant argued for such responsibility by suggesting people to utilize their reason to understand earthquakes and the disaster resulted from them as a social and political matter in the course of recovering from the crisis (Huet 2012, 53).

Independently from the philosophical debate of what had caused the disaster that followed the earthquake, the Marquis de Pombal, the Prime Minister of Portugal at the time, had to react quickly and he did so in the most rational and pragmatic way, a decision from which he benefitted a great deal, politically and economically. He authorized measurements of mitigation by preventing the plague spreading by burying corpses or throwing them out to sea, feeding the starving by opening shops, markets and kitchens, erecting shelters for the homeless, and ordering soldiers to guard the city at night. What he did in dealing with the hazard is just evident for a perspective of environmental disasters as negative, unwanted, destructive events, which may interrupt the national economy, and, as a consequence, an active role from the government against such abnormality is required. Yet, he did not only address how to normalize the crisis but also how to prevent if such hazard would happen again. His intentions went beyond just wanting to rebuild the city, for he also planned and constructed what were perhaps the first earthquake-resistant buildings in modern Europe (Zack 2009, 3). He worked to rebuild the

city and breathed energy into the economy in the aftermath of the disaster and, for this reason, Pombal has turned the calamity into “an occasion for modernization” (Rozario 2007, 18).

Although the modern thinking of the unnaturalness of natural disaster is rooted in the eighteenth century Enlightenment, it was not until the 1990s when scholars of disaster studies came to a common understanding of the human-causes of environmental disasters. Early social and cultural studies into disaster began with utilizing the concept of “adaptation,” referring to humans’ capability to meet with environmental hazards, which is in line with the environmental determinism perspective in the field of human ecology arguing that the environment where people live determines their culture (see Moore 1956; J. W. Anderson 1968). In this context, culture is understood as the results of human interposing between him/herself and his/her environment in order to ensure his/her security and survival (Carneiro 1968 in Milton 1996, 39). From this perspective, all existing human beings are seen as active actors to be able to institutionally or individually succeed in adapting themselves to particular environmental features, including the most hazardous ones. Environmental disaster was then culturally perceived as a feature of the nature. In other word, a disaster comes from “outside” of human. Indeed, the word “disaster” is derived from the Italian *dis-astro*, which literally means, “the destruction, despair and chaos resulting from the distant power of cosmic agencies” (Huet 2012, 4).

In the process of developing as a new discipline of disaster studies, “adaptation” has been advanced into a more specific concept of “vulnerability”

which can be defined as the degree of humans' (dis)ability to acclimatize accordingly to sudden, unexpected, hazardous environments (Oliver-Smith 1999; 2002; Bankoff 2003; Hilhorst and Bankoff 2004). To date more and more scholars of disaster studies and of other disciplines acknowledge it as a focal concept to build a comprehensive understanding of disaster in accordance with the vast growing of "vulnerability theory" since 1990s as it gives a broader analysis of cultural and material impacts of environmental hazards (Oliver-Smith 1996; 2002). This parallels to the introduction of political ecological approach in the 1970s to explain the issue of accessibility and control over natural resources (Watts 2000; Collins 2008) and in the context of disaster studies it suggests the incorporation of political, economic and social variables, in addition to sudden, destructive environmental events to get a wide-ranging understanding of disaster as merely just a event but also a process (Oliver-Smith 2002, 28).

As an event, a disaster can be seen in its "episodic dimension" for it may only occur when massive, immediate, environmental hazard(s) (earthquake, hurricane, volcanic eruption, tsunami, etc.) strikes a vulnerable human populations at a certain time (Bryant 1998). But as a process, one should consider that even though the entire community suffers from the perils, it is usually the marginalized poor who experience the most. Obviously, the survivors of the poor do not have appropriate social and economic resources to restore themselves to a normal state as quickly as the rich do (Cernea 1997; 2003). In other cases, many poor people who were living in a hazard-prone area not because they wanted it, but more because they were socially,

politically and culturally marginalized so that they had to dwell in environmentally-vulnerable areas (McCabe 2002; Bankoff 2003; Oliver-Smith 2010). Among others is the 2005 Katrina hurricane that has raised poverty as one contributing factor in producing vulnerabilities amongst disaster victims in New Orleans (Levitt and Whitaker 2009). Poverty is indeed a result of the long process of social and political marginalization that, in line with racial politics in the United States, has shaped unequal economic orders of the disaster-prone society. As a consequence, many people reject the idea of the disaster resulting from the hurricane as purely natural, some people even extremely perceived it as a “coldblooded murder” of the marginalized poor in the U.S. (Rozario 2007, 210–211). That is to say patterns of vulnerability are resulting from long socio-cultural processes which we call “development” (Oliver-Smith 2010). The approach of political ecology (or “vulnerability theory”) which has become increasingly popular today suggests the idea that the production and distribution of vulnerability in a society is cultural, social, and political (Hilhorst and Bankoff 2004). In other words, to understand the patterns of vulnerability in a community one should comprehend the history of marginalization in a community.

But, what is a disaster? According to Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, disaster is expected to happen in the complex intertwining of environmental hazards and social and ecological vulnerabilities, but they also argue “the conjunction of a human population and a potential destructive agent does not inevitably produce a disaster” (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002, 3). Indeed, some studies have been meant to prevent disaster to reoccur by finding a way to increase

society's "resiliency," the capacity to quickly recover from the perils resulting from environmental hazards of a society. Accordingly, some disaster reliefs are intended not only to recover from the damage (mitigation) but also to bolster individual and collective's resiliencies towards impending environmental hazards (preparedness). In other words, although disaster is inevitable, we can to some extent control the level of damage if only we have succeeded to manage in reducing its vulnerability and increasing its resiliency in facing environmental hazard(s).

This study follows the definition of "disaster" proposed by Oliver-Smith & Hoffman as:

a process/event combining a potentially destructive agent/force from the natural, modified, or built environment and a population in a socially and economically produced condition of vulnerability, resulting in a perceived disruption of the customary relative satisfactions of individual and social needs for physical survival, social order, and meaning. (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002, 4)

Following the definition, it shall be understood differently from "hazard,"

the forces, conditions, or technologies that carry a potential for social, infrastructural, or environmental damage. A hazard can be a hurricane, earthquake, or avalanche; it can also be a nuclear facility or a socioeconomic practice, such as using pesticides. The issue of hazard further incorporates the way a society perceives the danger or dangers, either environmental and/or technological, that it faces and the ways it allows the danger to enter its calculation of risk. (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002, 4)

There are two kinds of hazards: natural hazards (e.g., hurricanes, tectonic earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic earthquakes and eruptions, typhoons, storms, and many more) and technological hazards (e.g., oil spills, explosions of a nuclear facility or a pesticide factory, atomic bombings, many more). The increasing number of technological hazards nowadays has contributed to the growing unwritten consensus among scholars and laypeople to view current disasters more as cultural rather than purely natural mechanisms (Stallings 2002).

Marxist geographer David Harvey argues “all ecological projects are simultaneously political-economic projects and vice versa” (Harvey 1993, 25) and therefore one should be open for an awareness that every environmental project contains risks. “Risk,” defined by German sociologist Ulrich Beck as “the unknown and unintended threat that inheres in every systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities and might harm local populations or broader communities” (Beck 1992, 21–22), has led more people today to arrive at an understanding that to a certain degree environmental hazards are anthropogenic for they may be resulted from various precedent environmental-related development projects (Bankoff 2003; Button 2010; Oliver-Smith 2010). Disaster is then not only an incident in the sense that it occurs at a certain time and place, it is also a result of certain preexisting social structures and processes (Kreps 1985; Oliver-Smith 1996; 1999; 2002; Bankoff 2003; Button 2010). And for disaster is understood here in such contexts, its prevention, its production, its mitigation, and to some extent its escalation require human actors.

### **1.6. Actors of disaster: some questions to address**

A focus on the role of actors in human-nature relations and how they are interrelated is very crucial for discussing power in the course of an environmental crisis, including disaster. As Bryant and Bailey argue the relations between actors in environmental crisis are never equal for there is a tendency of one party to control the environment of another (Bryant and Bailey 1997, 37). And, as to Foucault actors are subject to and the subjects of power, it is crucial for this study to elaborate the contexts that has been governing human actors in producing, circulating, and maintaining certain truth claims about the mudflow disaster. In so doing, this study reiterates the idea of disaster as not only a social construction but also as a crucial feature to influence social actions.

Previous studies into the Lapindo mudflow indicated three interrelated main actors: the government, Lapindo, and the victims (Muhtada 2008; Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008; McMichael 2009; Gustomy 2012; Batubara and Utomo 2012). This study maintains the categorization and adds a proposal that the tripartite power relationships of these particular actors have been determining maintaining of the discursiveness of the disaster resulting from the mudflow. In the following I will deliver brief descriptions of each actor of the disaster and raise some questions to be addressed in this study.

#### **The government**

Disasters are frequently seen as negative, unwanted, destructive events that may interrupt national economy and many people expected the active role

of the government to deal with the abnormality that follows the hazard as soon as possible (Faure 2007; Sugarman 2007; Zack 2009). The government has been perceived as one political institution that shall be responsible when a disaster occurs in its territory and strikes its citizens (Dynes 2000; Huet 2012; Rozario 2007). It has been a duty of the government as a modern institution to develop prevention systems and strategies for impending environmental hazards (both natural and technological) and to make sure that a disaster, if such had happened, will not grow larger and broader. Accordingly, some hazard-prone countries have been developing prevention systems and strategies to increase their resiliencies towards environmental hazards for such would not turn into disasters (J. W. Anderson 1968; McCabe 2002; Bankoff 2003). Nonetheless, statements from governmental officials have always been used as the main reference for developing general knowledge about a disaster (Button 2010; Sood, Stockdale, and Rogers 1987). And for the government has the authority to define an event to be (or not to be) a disaster (Rozario 2007; J. W. Anderson 1968; Button 2010) to some extent it has been one key actor to maintain the discursiveness of the disaster.

Up to recently, there has never been a declaration from the Indonesian government concerning the official status of the mudflow hazard and disaster in Porong, East Java, whether it is natural or technological, of which would affect the politics and mitigation over it. However, to date a growing number of government officials have become key campaigners for the “natural disaster” discourse followed by the consequence of taking over the corporate’s responsibilities by the government in gradual (chapters 4 and 5). But, what kind

of power that makes such possible? And to what extent does the disaster politics shaped within this context has effects on the social and environment?

### **Lapindo Brantas**

The presence of a corporation (i.e., Lapindo) has been the most compelling fact in the course of the mudflow disaster in comparison with other environmental disasters in Indonesia. Obviously, as the party that has been widely accused for triggering environmental hazards, corporations have a strong motive to limit and reduce its responsibility to suffer from the damage (cf. Button 1999; M. D. Anderson 2011) and one of their efforts has been to urge the government to declare a “natural disaster” over the incident, like in the case of Lapindo mudflow. The scenario is as follows: if the mudflow is officially confirmed as “natural disaster” then Lapindo will not be the party who is solely responsible for the disaster aftermath, but the government is (Batubara 2013; Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008).

Lapindo has benefited from the close and collusive connection between Aburizal Bakrie, a leading figure of Lapindo’s parent company (the Bakries), and former president of Indonesia (2004-2014) Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Aburizal is one cadre of Golkar Party, the ruling party of the New Order Indonesia with recognizably strong influence in the country’s national and local politics until now. After the fall of the New Order in 1998, the party has been dominating the Indonesian parliament elections owing to the fact that it came to be the winner of the 2004 election and the runner-up of the 1999, 2009 and 2014 elections. Aburizal has been in a strong bargaining position in Indonesian

national politics since he was acting as a coordinating minister in the cabinet (2004-2009), then the chairperson of the party (2009-2015). Hence, the politics of the mudflow disaster has been situated in a serious conflict of interest since the government has a tendency to protect and shield Lapindo as the culprit of the incident (chapters 4 & 5; cf. Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008). To that end, more questions shall be raised. In which ways and fields does Lapindo maintain such its claim for a “natural disaster” over the mudflow? And to what extent does its intervention has power effect on the other actors of the disaster this study is focusing on, the government and the mudflow victims?

### **Disaster victims**

Every disaster creates a new social category in the society, i.e., disaster victims. Whereas most people would think disaster victims are powerless actors, to some extent this study argues that they have been very authoritative in exercising power in the course and aftermath of the disaster (chapters 3 & 5). To date, the official disaster zone of the mudflow released by the government consists of an area of twenty villages in three districts in Sidoarjo regency. The government confines inhabitants of these villages as victims for living in an uninhabitable area and for this reason they have the rights to be compensated (chapter 3). Intriguingly, the victimization has been accounted on the base of certificate of ownership (of land and building) and as a consequence there has been no official statement from the government concerning the number of the evicted people. An unofficial report mentioned that more than 150,000 people have been discharged from their homes

(Richard 2011). According to the data I collected from the fieldwork, I found these victims underwent unimaginable experiences: uprooted from their homes, struggling in evacuation areas, finding new dwellings, starting new lives, and haunted by the shadow of their experiences facing the hazard and other past memories. However, they are indeed a key actor to nurture the discourse of “anthropogenic disaster” in the society, but how do they reinforce such a claim? And to what extent does their effort has power effect on the power competition of the social construction of the disaster?

### **1.7. An ethnography of statements**

One fundamental issue of conducting the study has been the emergent of a dominating perspective to view disaster as never purely natural but rather highly politically contested event/process by certain actors (see 1.5). Such has an intricate effect on the writing of disaster narrative of this study for anthropogenic causes of the mudflow have been dominating the production of knowledge about the disaster not only among scholars but also common people, especially disaster victims. However, some key actors of the mudflow disaster are disagreeing with this perspective and the competition among them has been a key factor in maintaining the discursiveness of the disaster in the course of the mudflow incident in Porong. Either insistently accepting or aggressively resisting to certain discourse, these actors are in essential exercising power.

This study is constructed from a series of critical discourse analyses towards various statements articulated in various discursive fields. This study

takes “statements” from which discourses are assembled as units of analysis for they are the basic to conduct an analysis of discourses. This focus is inspired from some clues of what Foucault means by “discourse.”

Instead of gradually reducing the rather fluctuating meaning of the word “discourse,” I believe I have in fact added to its meaning: treating it sometimes as the general domain of *all statements*, sometimes as *an individualizable group of statements*, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for *a number of statements* (Foucault 1972, 80, emphasis added).

This study is however not meant for just a discourse analysis, but rather a “critical” discourse analysis. And, as to Foucault, critique aims to question the truth claims and power inheres in such claims (Foucault 2007), a critical discourse analysis should be aimed to study the struggle of human actors for imposing particular claims, which are believed to be true, and excluding some others from consideration to be true (cf. Mills 1997, 16). This study, then, aims to examine various, conflicting statements concerning the mudflow disaster in Porong by addressing these following questions: *how are those statements formed? In which institutions are they grouped? In which ways and events are they being articulated? To what extent do they have power effects in the society? And how do they relate each other?*

## **Posko**

The statements analyzed in this study are collected since September 2008 until November 2014 from a combination of a multifaceted fieldwork in the Porong region over the period of thirteen months, ranging from 2009 to 2013,

and a series of archival researches.<sup>3</sup> At first the study was focusing on the role of media in the social construction of the incident and during the period, in every phase of the fieldwork, I intentionally visited some media offices in Jakarta and Surabaya to gain their news archives related to the incident. In addition to the media visit, I also spent some time in public and university libraries in Jakarta, Jogjakarta, Surabaya and Malang in search of previous publications that would be relevant for this study. In doing so, I discovered that statements are not only stored in the media but also in various discursive fields therefore I began to expand my hunt for “archives” in its dual forms as “the depositories of statements and as the statements contained therein” (Zeitlyn 2012).

In the course of the 2009 fieldwork, I discovered several alternative media produced and circulated to counter information provided by mainstream media and it was the beginning of my engagement with some activists of Posko Keselamatan Korban Lumpur Lapindo (a coordinating post for the safety of the victims of Lapindo mudflow; henceforth, “Posko”) the producers of these media.

The Posko was an outcome of a big meeting of some delegations of disaster victims and activists from various local and national NGOs. The meeting, which took place in Jakarta in July 2008, resulted in three recommendations *a)* to give legal assistances for victims, *b)* to design strategies for economic recovery of the society and to provide immediate basic

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<sup>3</sup> It began as part of my master’s research at the Leiden University, the Netherlands (2008-2009). To date, I am still continuing to collect media reportages and other documents regarding the case.

needs of victims and c) to facilitate such activities everyone agreed for the establishment of a coordinating post adjacent to the disaster zone in Porong. Over time, the Posko has become a center point of information exchange for anyone—not only for victims and activists but also for journalists and researchers, including myself—who wants to know more about the latest progress of the case. To ease the circulation of information, there are various alternative media produced, such as *Kanal* newsletter, *Suara Porong* radio, a weblog (<http://korbanlumpur.info>), a Facebook group ([Friends of Lapindo Victims](#)), a Facebook page and a Twitter account (@KorbanLapindo). The weblog has been the most survivable media, while the contents of the Facebook page and Twitter account are basically tailing information in the weblog. This is more because the weblog has been the least in need of fund and an Indonesian NGO for the literacy of information technology, *Air Putih*, has been providing a free quota in its server for the weblog. According to a recent data from the NGO, by May 2014 [korbanlumpur.info](http://korbanlumpur.info) has been the largest weblog on its server compared to other existing weblogs the organization maintains.

From 2008 to 2010, the operational cost of Posko's activities had been relying on grant from TIFA Foundation (the Indonesian branch of George Soros's Open Society Institute) under the scheme of "Support on Strategic Issues," which was intended to articulate victims' voices through the production of alternative media.<sup>4</sup> In 2010, the Posko received another grant

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<sup>4</sup> Within a period of six months (from July to December 2008), the TIFA foundation also gave a similar grant to a team of researchers at the Airlangga University in Surabaya to monitor national and local newspapers' reportages about the disaster. In order to disseminate the result of the monitoring to the public, especially disaster victims, the team published a series of newsletters, namely *Somasi* (Suryandaru 2009).

from the foundation under a different scheme of “Exercising the Rights to Information in Public Advocacy” to conduct a series of advocacy programs, namely “Public Information Disclosure.” It was meant to do a series of activities of entreating governmental agencies in Sidoarjo, Surabaya (the capital of East Java) and Jakarta (the capital of Indonesia) to provide and publish information related to their plans and strategies for the following issues: the rehabilitation of social and ecological damage resulting from the mudflow, the relocation of public infrastructures and other facilities, and the management of social and ecological risks.

The grant ended in the end of 2010 which was also the time of some activists started to leave Porong one after another. The reasons are most them were not originated from Porong and had to take a better job opportunity in other cities, mostly in Jakarta, Indonesia’s capital. To date, these alumni are still maintaining relations with the remaining activists in Porong, who are predominantly victims-cum-activists. To a certain extent the Posko’s alumni have been playing an important role to link the Posko to various national and foreign institutions. Occasionally, they visited Porong and/or organized various activities in other cities to gather public supports for the mudflow victims. These activists have been playing a prominent role as both my interlocutors to jointly unravel the complexity of the Lapindo case and gatekeepers in mapping, finding and interviewing informants, especially victims-informants of this study.

In the course of the 2012 and 2013 fieldwork, I have expanded my conception of archives not only to the “official” documents organized by some governmental institutions or other formal organizations (companies, the media,

universities, public libraries) but also to individual documentations, organized by the victims. Thus, whereas library study is aimed to some already articulated, recorded statements, the fieldwork is aimed to fetch the disarticulated, unrecorded statements from disaster victims. This study, then, can be seen as an alternative way to mediate the seemingly powerless actors in order to disclose these inarticulate statements concerning their experiences and viewpoints of the event/process they experienced (cf. J. C. Scott 1990). To date, I have collected more and more statements about the incident stored in various formats, such as company's letters, legal documents, government policies and regulations, photos, films, literatures, scientific article journals, research reports, public forums, group discussions, and interpersonal talks. Among others storages of statements, the most fascinating are collective memories and commemorative practices, like the one I presented at the outset of the chapter, performed by disaster victims, especially those who affiliated with Sanggar Alfaz in the Besuki village.

### **Sanggar Alfaz of Besuki**

Sanggar Alfaz (henceforth, "Sanggar") would never exist without the initiative of Muhammad Irsyad, a Besuki villager. Cak Irsyad, as many people call him, was very concerned with the children in his village who got less parental attentions. Their parents were too busy in demanding compensation either from Lapindo or the government, while there was no program to deal with the victim's children. In early 2009, with the help of some villagers, lecturers and students of several campuses in Surabaya and Malang, activists

of local and national NGOs and some religious leaders, he founded Sanggar Anak Alfaz (meaning, the open house for children's happiness).<sup>5</sup> It was named after his late-foster mother, Fauziah (from Arabic, meaning "happiness"), who once had a dream to build a shelter for orphans or abandoned children. The initial activity was to provide the children with weekly dance training on the front porch of Irsyad's house. In addition to the training, Irsyad, on behalf of Sanggar, began to receive new- and used-books from some individuals and non-governmental institutions, with which he installed a small library for children in his living room. Over time Sanggar has become one important locus of donations for victims in the village that came from many non-governmental communities in Indonesia and international as well as a social sphere where people, especially the victims meet each other and get acquainted with other people.

One key network of Sanggar has been Jakarta-based NGO Sanggar Anak Akar that focuses on providing informal education for marginalized children, especially the street children (*anak jalanan*). Regularly, some of its members from Jakarta visited the Besuki village and taught the children some musical skills and how to write songs. "Music has been the breath of Sanggar," said Irsyad to almost every visitor. As time goes by, Sanggar has become both social and cultural sphere for children to express their feelings (not only concerning disaster-related issues but also other private or communal matters)

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<sup>5</sup> It seems that the term *sanggar* ("open house") has become a brand for a community dedicating its activity to provide informal education for marginalized children in several cities in Indonesia. To name some *sanggars* that have been mostly related to Sanggar Alfaz in Besuki Timur are Sanggar Anak Akar in Jakarta, Sanggar Bocah Dolanan in Kediri, Sanggar Merah Merdeka in Surabaya and Sanggar Sahabat Anak in Malang from which Sanggar Alfaz has been receiving material and immaterial supports.

in various artistic forms, especially music and theatrical performances. As a matter of fact, owing to their artistic skills these children have been invited to various places and major events in some cities in Indonesia to campaign for the rights of all marginalized children and especially the children of disaster victims in Porong. One prestigious event is the biennial *South to South (StoS) Film Festival* in Jakarta, a festival organized by a consortium of multinational NGOs for the increase of environmental awareness in the “southern countries” through films.

Apart from the rights of the children, economic recovery of disaster victims has become one main target of Sanggar. In October 2011, the name of Sanggar Anak Alfaz was eventually changed into Sanggar Alfaz. The exclusion of the word “*anak*” (children) marked the extension of age limit of its exponents and as a result over time more and more villagers from various age and gender involved in Sanggar’s activities. These people were mostly peasants working for landowners of the village or from other villages, but since the mudflow covered most paddy fields at which they used to work many of them had to find jobs in agriculture-unrelated fields, mainly in construction projects as unskilled laborers (*buruh kasar*). As an effort to return to their original profession, in September 2011 some exponents of Sanggar did an experimented with greenhouse farming. It was aimed to restimulate the peasants’ enthusiasm in farming after losing paddy fields. Unfortunately, failed to generate sustainable profit and could only suffice the daily subsistence, the activity did not continue well. In February 2012, Sanggar began a small-scale industry of screen-printing (*sablon*), mainly t-shirts and banners, which was

quite a success seeing that so many orders were coming until an essential problem arisen when one victim-turn-to-activist, who was responsible as the treasurer, left Porong for another activism in Sulawesi for several months starting from June 2012.

Perhaps, one successful key activity of Sanggar was *jimpitan sehat* (community-based health insurance). Every Saturday evening, dozens of villagers, mostly women, gathered in Irsyad's house and collected 1,000 rupiah per person. The money should not be used for anything else other than the health insurance of the villagers. It was then stored as petty money (*uang kas*) in the hand of the treasurer who would release the money to subsidize those who needed immediate medical expenses. Along with the activity to collect cash, the participants discussed some problems they faced mostly health-related issues, e.g., how to get listed and received government-based health insurance program of Jamkesmas. For several times, they had invited local public officials to provide information as well as to deliver their aspirations to a higher authority in the government. To that end, Sanggar has become more than a place of public meetings for it has become a public sphere for villagers to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and hopes to each other and government officials.

The exponents of Sanggar and other Besuki villagers have given me an alternative viewpoint of how a group of disaster victims understands the mudflow disaster and how it is different from and/or similar to other victim groups. A few weeks ahead of the 2012 fieldwork, the central government eventually released a new map of disaster zone that included the village as well

as some other villages (chapter 2). It meant also that the villagers of these villages would soon receive several aids from the government, such as six-month living allowances (*jatah hidup*), two-year house rent (*uang sewa*) and evacuation aid (*uang pindah*), indicated in a presidential regulation (No. 33 of 2012). At the time, by learning from the ambiguous payment mechanism to earlier victims, Besuki villagers were still not convinced yet that the government would pay the compensation accordingly but vision of eviction and disintegration began to haunt the people.

Ahead of my return to the village for the 2013 fieldwork, I was informed that the villagers had received the twenty-percent down payment of the compensation from the government and they were in the process to manage the relocation to new resettlements. I noticed some changes in the lifestyle of the villagers. They became consumptive; new motorcycles were wandering in the street village; cars, some of them were brand new, were parked in the front yards of some houses; kids were playing with new handheld gadgets, such as tablets or smartphones. Along with those changes, I sensed a very high level of anxiety among these villagers for the vision of community disintegration had become more concrete and inevitable. Social tensions between villagers were getting stronger due to the existing open competition between different groups in gathering families to relocate together in separate locations (chapter 2). Simultaneously, leaders of each group had to face other problems with land brokers and inhabitants of the new places.

A few months after I left the village to begin the writing of this study, I received information from my interlocutors that the Besuki villagers eventually

received all of the compensation from the government. They vacated their village and began to rebuild their lives in separate places.

### **1.8. Positionality and limitation of this study**

If someone ever asks me about my position in the Lapindo case, my answer is bold and solid: “I believe that the disaster is anthropogenic and what happen afterwards are just some efforts to prove it or to deny it.” Such positionality has been a major issue that has been haunting the entire process of writing this study for I have become another agent of power of the disaster. Ethnography is a “situated knowledge” (Haraway 1988) and therefore the main concern in the methodology is not only about how to collect information about and from the informants but also how to maintain mutual trusts with these people in the process of writing “their culture.” And since ethnography offers nothing but “partial truths” (Clifford 1982), it is important to briefly clarify my position as an ethnographer in the fieldwork and how such positionality contributes to this study.

#### **Being a native**

If ethnography meant to the writing of the cultures of “the others,” the most challenging positionality in the course of this study has been my status as a native ethnographer. Nowadays, especially after exoticism and the rise of postmodernism, the number of anthropologists investigating their own societies has been growing significantly but this issue has been very little to be discussed widely since many has taken for granted anthropology’s tasks as to write “other cultures” (Peirano 1998; Elie 2012). Malinowski, based on his

experience living in New Guinea, suggested anthropologists to “go native” emphasizing their roles in “participating” instead of only “observing” the society. However, “going native” has a different state from “being” native (Kanuha 2000). In the former state, an ethnographer mainly represents his/herself an “outsider” for it is very difficult for the ethnographer to be accepted as “insider” of the observed community. On the contrary, in “being native,” the self-representation of the ethnographer would be much depended on the expertise in locating his/herself to be only “outsider,” only “insider” or both “insider/outsider” of the community he/she studied (Kanuha 2000; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984; Nakhleh 1979; Jones 1970). I have to admit that being a native ethnographer has indeed been more beneficial rather than detrimental in the course of the fieldwork, yet it has been increasingly challenging in the writing up process because it deals with the ethnographer’s own knowledge system (cf. Rabinow 1986).

For I speak the same languages (Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese) as my interlocutors and informants do, I hardly found any problems in understanding what they said and their language play as well in the course of the fieldwork. In many instances, interviews with victim-informants were conducted in informal conditions. The hardest part was how to control the conversation because informants tended to dominate it. In fact, though I have prepared a list of guiding questions, interviews were conducted as if I was listening to them telling me their experiences, their complains, and their hopes regarding the catastrophe they experienced. It seemed to me that they just wanted to be

heard as they felt that the government and the mass media never listened to their voices and concerns.

But having the same skin color and speaking the same language does not guarantee me to be fully accepted as an “insider” of the community. There were some reasons for the issue to emerge. First, I was born and raised in Java, but I spent my previous years mostly in big cities, such as Surabaya (the capital of East Java) and Malang. Despite the fact that both are located just a few kilometers from Porong, I was educated more as a “city person” (*orang kota*) rather than as a “village person” (*orang desa*) and as a “city person” I have to admit that I am not very familiar with the live in rural areas, where I conducted most of the fieldwork for this study. A second factor is my Christian background living in a predominantly Moslem community. In the beginning, I thought that this would be a problem, however it did not appear as a big issue owing to the fact that my informants never asked or questioned my religious background directly. Moreover, daily talks on religious issues were almost never occurred for they would rather discuss their experiences as disaster victims which I found very interesting to be explored their reasons to not link their sufferings to religious (Islamic) doctrines. Even so, I noted that many victim-informants actually have been disappointed with their religious leaders who only concerned with their own worldly/economic-interests rather than keeping the solidarity as one community. In many cases, many religious leaders have become Lapindo’s lackeys in recovering the company’s images in its presence of victims and the public at large. Such a disappointment was also one factor that urged the recalling and reproduction of preexisting pre-Islamic

Javanese narratives, instead of religious (Islamic) principles, by the exponents of Sanggar Alfaz in explaining their state (chapter 5).

Despite some small cultural shocks during my first stay in the village due to the abovementioned factors, it was the status of “disaster victims” that has come out to be a bold line between my informants and me. It is like they were saying, “we’re the victims and you’d never felt the way we feel.” Such has been the most difficult for I can only give a great sympathy for them as disaster victims and although I have tried hard to comprehend their feelings I would scarcely claim that I had empathy for their lost and sufferings. But one thing for sure, the status has been a mark for the Otherness of this study.

### **Mediating the victims**

Doing a research into the Lapindo case has put me, and perhaps everyone else too, in a dilemma (see also Drake 2013). As described in 0 and 1.6 above, the production and reproduction of knowledge concerning the disaster has been situated in ongoing power relations between two oppositional camps. One camp believes that the mudflow is initiated by mining activity of Lapindo and therefore it is an anthropogenic disaster. The other camp argues for a major earthquake triggered the mudflow to say it is a natural disaster. The dichotomy has generated an ongoing battle of power between different actors. Hence, whichever options I take for delivering this present study, anyone can easily raise critical questions concerning my positionality in conducting this study and the knowledge produced from it. I have to admit, it is nearly

impossible for me or anyone else, to present an objective, impartial narrative about the disaster to the readers.

To a certain degree I do not really care whether the eruption is proven as anthropogenic (drilling error) or natural (earthquake trigger) because I am more interested with power relations between three interrelated actors (the government, Lapindo, and disaster victims) in promoting and maintaining particular statements related to the incident. However, since ethnographic fieldwork is about participant observation, it seems to me that it is crucial to point out that this present study is not only about “how to observe” but also “how to participate” in such relations. For this very reason, I tend to not using either *lumpur Lapindo* or *lumpur Sidoarjo* to name the hazard. Instead, I am proposing another term, i.e., *Lapindo case*, for it allows scholars to discuss the complexity of the incident beyond just an environmental hazard. As I will show in the following chapters, the danger and risk of the mudflow has faltered the mediocre social system and the destruction of the society and ecology resulting from it has led to various fundamental rearrangements of human-nature relationship in Java and generally in Indonesia.

I realize that my activist-interlocutors and victim-informants do not expect much hope on me as they put it on White, foreign, *bule* researchers or journalists. The first time I got the impression of this was during the visit of the United Nations (UN) special rapporteur on adequate housing, Raquel Rolnik, on June 6, 2013. Raquel and her team went to a group of women victims of Ar-Rohmah to have a small focus group discussion in which one female victim spontaneously meddled in the conversation:

Please, tell to the world, so that [the world] know our suffering. [...] Please, tell to the world, is there anyone who wants to help us? Let the world know that we are very, very suffering. [...] Tell to the world that Lapindo is irresponsible. For seven years we are living in uncertainty.<sup>6</sup>

Raquel responded to her by saying that the Lapindo case and the current condition of the mudflow victims would be a part of her report to the UN. Even more, she promised to the victims on that meeting to bring the case in the UN general meeting, sometimes in March 2014. However, she could not make a promise her whether if and about when the UN would finally intervene in the Lapindo case. Sadly, in a preliminary report, which was released in a press conference at the UNDP office in Jakarta on June 14, 2013, no single paragraph mentioned the Porong visit, or the Lapindo case.

### **“Taking side”**

I learned that my victim-informants value me to be harmless, in comparison with journalists or government officials, because by having discussion with me they got some lessons especially in how to frame the case within a broader and more sustainable perspective than general public would see it. Still, although they do not expect much from me as they do from other researchers, I can feel a major force that has been driving me in the course of writing this study to empower their position. Hence, in constructing the whole study (designing, doing the fieldwork, and the writing up) I have to be frank that I had to struggle with some unsettled problems. First and foremost has been the difficulty to describe the event/process in a structured, chronological,

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<sup>6</sup> Cited from a voice recording of the meeting (June 6, 2013).

comprehensive narrative for the production of statements concerning the hazard has been situated in complex power relations between Lapindo, the government and disaster victims. Throughout this study, I have tried my best to stay focus on conducting a critical discourse analysis into various, conflicting statements that have been articulated by different actors of the Lapindo case. By doing so, I discovered unequal power relations between disaster victims and the coalition of the government and Lapindo. The government, according to many victim-informants, does not seem to have enough, strong political will and sovereignty in facing the corporate for there has been a mutual interest shared with these two actors, of which has made the collusion to secure their position instead of solving the actual problem of the victims stronger than ever.

I am very aware that taking side is inevitable in this study and the side I take is the marginalized, vulnerable and seemingly powerless actor, i.e., disaster victims. I believe such positionality provides simultaneously the strength and weakness of this present study. Frankly, the most challenging factor of being a native ethnographer has been not in the fieldwork phase but rather in the course of the “writing up” and in the aftermath of the whole study. In the long run, as a native I have to do a reverse activity like most foreign anthropologists would do. Subsequent to the completion of this study, it is very likely for me to be more engaged with and become a part of the case for I will be very much “coming back to” rather “departing from” the field. In addition to this, my status as a university lecturer will be very critical for the future campaign and advocacy of the fulfillment of the victims’ rights. So far, together with activist-interlocutors and victim-informants, I have conducted

several activities to empower some victims by supplying them with reliable information and critical thinking about the case. To precondition victims with these modalities has been very strategic for them in negotiating with the government and Lapindo. Such efforts will increase the bargain power of the victims and I believe that this is my responsibility as an intellectual in the case.

### **1.9. The organization of the study**

The following chapters begin with an introduction to *the* field in and about which this study is taken and addressing (Chapter 2, “Porong, a Space of Contestation”). Relying on a combination of ethnographic and historical data, the chapter addresses a history of political ecology of the Porong region and how the politicization of the region has become more apparent following the mudflow hazard in May 2006. Although the chapter mainly focuses on historical descriptions of the field, to a degree it traces the formation of a “heterotopia” (Foucault 2008) over which power has been contested by certain actors of disaster.

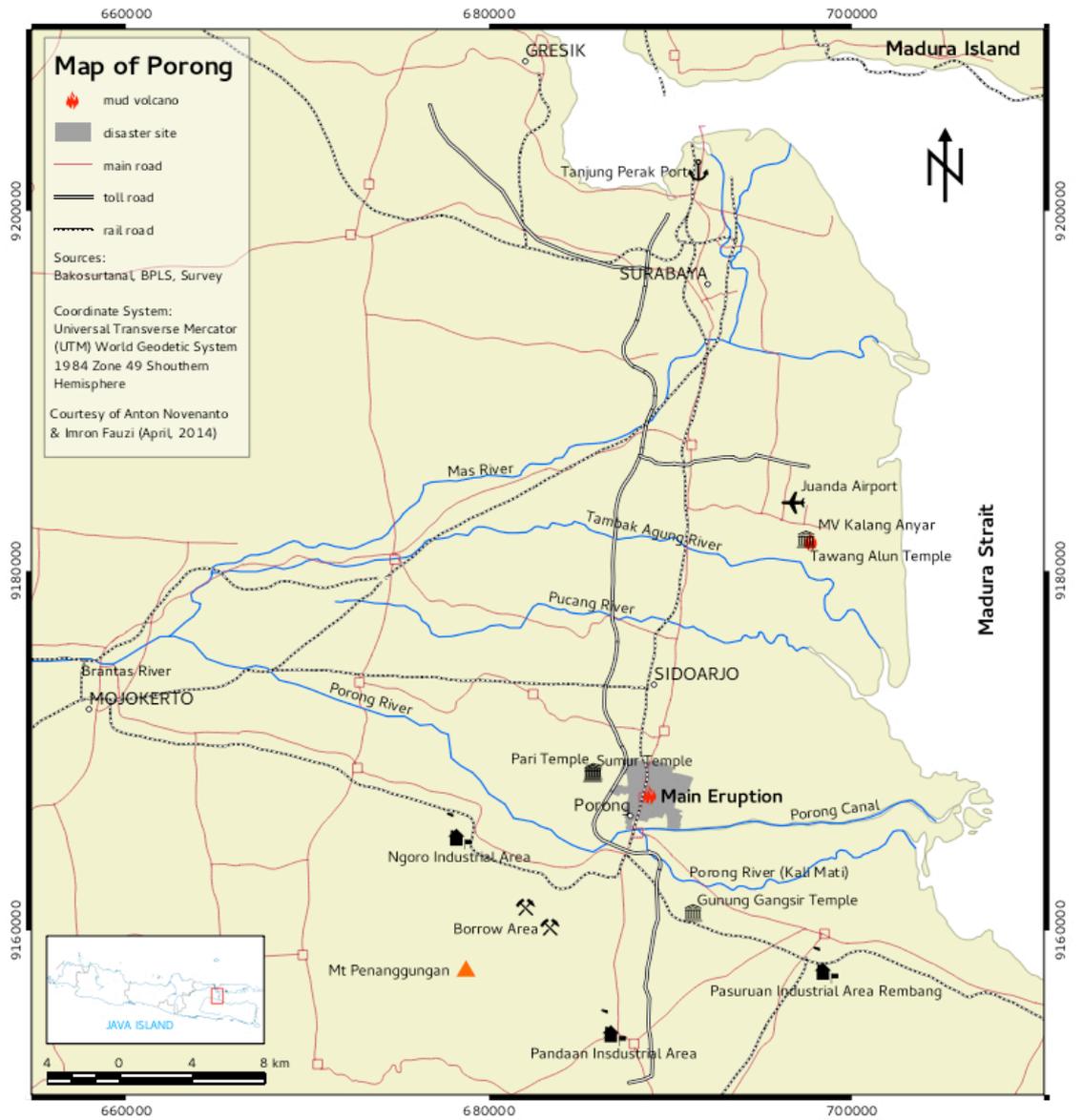
Chapter 3 (Risky Mitigation) mainly explores the role of the government as one actor of power in the Lapindo case. It is constructed mainly from a critical discourse analysis into disaster policies produced by the Indonesian government to mitigate the mudflow hazard. It is intended to reveal the gradual transposition of the government’s framing of the disaster. Additionally, the data collected from the fieldwork will show how mitigatory measurements performed have created more social and ecological risks and damages in the “official” disaster zone and beyond. The chapter argues that the government is

playing a significant role in making the disaster to be more systematic on the grounds that inherent in the disaster politics of environmental disaster is risks to cause social disasters.

Chapter 4 (Contesting Statements) focuses on the role of Lapindo as the accused-party initiating the mudflow to win the battle of power over other actors by producing certain claims about the initiation of the mudflow. The chapter concentrates on a discussion of some conflicting statements, which were articulated in various discursive fields of social construction of environmental problems (Hannigan 2006). It addresses how the company has been struggling to contest the spreading discourse of “anthropogenic disaster” with a counter-discourse of “natural disaster” and as a result it has been one actor in enlivening and reviving the battle of power/knowledge.

Chapter 5 (Muddied Memories) mainly explores in which ways disaster victims engage in the battle of power by producing their version of truth. It is constructed through my observation into a series of mudflow anniversaries. Although no uniformity of how victims commemorate the mudflow, the commemorations are victims’ efforts to articulate a persisting statement from time to time. The statement is clear: the mudflow has not been just an environmental catastrophe, but also a “political tragedy”—which reiterates the basic argument of political ecology (cf. M. D. Anderson 2011; Bryant and Bailey 1997; Button 2010; Huet 2012; Oliver-Smith 2010; Rozario 2007). The chapter explores how disaster victims who are to many people perceived as powerless are indeed a very powerful actor of Lapindo case through performing those various commemorative practices.

Chapter 6 addresses some questions that this introduction has raised and, as a conclusion chapter, it aims to recapitulate conflicting framings over the Lapindo case performed by each actor and in which ways the framings are inter-related one another.



Map 1 Porong and its surroundings

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## Chapter 2 | Porong, a Space of Contestation

### 2.1. Everything is no more?

One afternoon of mid-June 2012, I was heading to the Besuki Timur hamlet (*dusun*) through the dysfunctional toll road of Gempol-Porong. When I crossed over the bridge of the Porong River I saw beautiful scenery of a sunset. One thing that came on my mind at the time was I had to capture that rare moment from the top of the mud embankment.

In Sanggar Alfaz there was a seventeen-year-old Hisyam and without any further question I asked him to bring me to *Titik 25* (Point 25) on the embankments. There where some local tourists escorted by some *ojek tanggul* (motorcycle-taxi drivers) (Fig. 2.1). While the tourists took pictures of the twilight and some other things, one *ojek tanggul* acting as a professional tour guide explained to them about the history of the Lapindo mudflow and its impacts. He pointed some areas in which he claimed as the location of his former village. “Now all has gone” (*semua sudah hilang*), one *ojek tanggul* said to his guests.

Shortly after taking some pictures and as the day was getting dark, Hisyam and I headed back to the Besuki village. This time he took a different path, to the northeast (we entered from the south), but still over the embankment in the eastern of the main eruption. I could see more areas were covered by mud. Hisyam recalled that the embankment we passed over was new. It was built between 2008 and 2009 as a secondary layer encircling the inner-embankment ring (*tanggul cincin*). The reason was if the inner-embankment collapsed there would still be outer-walls to hold the mud from flowing to the east, where his village was located. Driving the motorcycle, he told me some of his childhood memories playing around on

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that area with friends. “There were houses, buildings and schools, places,” he said, “but everything is no more” (*semuanya sudah tidak ada lagi*).



*Fig. 2.1 Everything is no more (Photo courtesy of Anton Novenanto, 2012)*

The writing of this chapter was at first intended to introduce the field of this study, the Porong region. The intention to introduce the field is however still unchanged, but to a degree has expanded on the grounds that in the course of the fieldwork I discovered unexpected so-called “local knowledges” about human-nature relationship in the region. These knowledges provide explanations of historical and social contexts of the local people and their interrelationships with other people and their environment. Calling from political ecological perspective, it examines Porong as a space of power contestation

over time. Porong is therefore not only a place for living, but also a living space and as the chapter shows it has been a space to which humans performing various ecological modifications resulting in the increase of power relations, especially between local people and outliers.

## **2.2. Space and power**

Following an understanding that anthropological knowledge is grounded on ethnographic data collected from fieldwork and by definition *fieldwork* is “a series of activities collecting ethnographic data from the field” (cf. Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Sluka and Robben 2007), a question shall be raised: *where* is the field of this study? The illustration of the top of the embankment on that afternoon, which is taken from my fieldnote, demonstrates this issue of the space of fieldwork of this study. The mudflow has engulfed an area of more than 800 hectare and its physical impacts have a tremendous ecological effect on another 600 hectare surrounding. There are no more villages to live in, but does this also mean that there is no more space for ethnographic fieldwork to be done?

The space for ethnographic fieldwork can be categorized as Foucault’s conception of heterotopia (Foucault 2008); a space where ethnographer presumes otherness in existence (Foucault 2002). Accordingly, the field from where ethnographic data to construct anthropological knowledge is collected is not a field that has already there waiting for an ethnographer to do the fieldwork. Rather, it is a result of a negotiation between the ethnographer’s theoretical understanding of some topics and his/her practical experience in

exploring the space of fieldwork. It is to say that the field of ethnographic study is socially, culturally and to some extent politically constructed. Currently, the location(s) of a fieldwork activity is very likely to shifting and expanding in accordance to theoretical quests of the ethnographer (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

Geographers Stuart Elden and Jeremy Crampton summarize how Foucault's works are very much concerned with space in relation to power:

From architectural plans for asylums, hospitals and prisons; to the exclusion of the leper and the confinement of victims in the partitioned and quarantined plague town; from spatial distributions of knowledge to the position of geography as a discipline; to his [Foucault's, AN] suggestive comments on heterotopias, the spaces of libraries, of art and literatures; analyses of town planning and urban health; and a whole host of other geographical issues, Foucault's work was always filled with implications and insights concerning spatiality. (Elden and Crampton 2007, 1)

One good example of Foucault's concern of space is perhaps can be found in *The Birth of the Clinic* in which his questions on the hospital and hospitalization are essential in addressing the politics of space and localization of the sick (Foucault 1976, 3–5). Another example is Foucault's lectures on asylums (delivered in Winter semester of 1973/1974) in which he addressed the question of how a specific doctor, i.e., psychiatrist, has been very powerful to define madness and therefore determine to localize a person in an asylum instead of hospital or prison (Foucault 2006). The practice of localizing of mad persons into asylums has been, according to Foucault, practices of power in a way that people create other space(s). He writes,

[T]he asylums had to be similar to the colonies, workshops, colleges, and prisons, that is to say, that the specificity of the asylum is to be exactly homogeneous to that from which it is differentiated, by virtue of the line separating madness and non-madness. (Foucault 2006, 166)

Although Foucault never wrote about environmental disaster, he had done critical analysis into various aberrant spaces which he calls “heterotopias” (Foucault 2008). It is meant to be different from “utopia”—where the ideal and good is located and therefore it is rather an imaginary than a real space. On the contrary, “heterotopia” is a combination of our imagination of otherness and of physical space where people locate abnormalities; it is the place of “otherness” (Mead 1995, 13). It can be a new space formed by the society to locate what is considered abnormal in specific places, like in the case of hospitals, asylums, or prisons. But in most cases the space and its inhabitants have already existed and we tend to attach our imagination of “otherness” to them, such as “the colony” (D. Scott 1994), “the Orient” (Said 1995), “madness” (Foucault 2006), “sickness” (Foucault 1976), “deviants” (Foucault 1995), and many more. To Foucault, heterotopia is a site of struggles (Topinka 2010, 55); it is universal, existing in every society in different forms (Foucault 2008, 18). One key initiator of heterotopias, according to Foucault, has been crisis and in the context of disaster studies, one can add environmental hazards as well as patterns of vulnerability to be sources of crisis to generate the heterotopia of disaster in existence. As for disaster has been frequently considered as going against the normal pattern of life, it has compelled people

to define what is “normal” and what is “abnormal” in their lives since every disaster results in material and immaterial crises (M. D. Anderson 2011).

Since 1990s political ecological approach has become increasingly dominating in the effort to define disaster suggesting the incorporation of political, economic, social, and cultural factors in getting comprehensive knowledge of disaster (Oliver-Smith 2002, 28). In this context, disaster should be understood differently from hazard as for the former should be perceived as a social and cultural concept that may exist when the latter meets with vulnerable populations (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002). However, some recent studies have been focusing on how development projects have led to various man-made environmental hazards, destructions, and degradations in the so-called “Third World countries” (Bryant 1992; Bryant and Bailey 1997; Oliver-Smith 2010). It is to say that there is a possibility of environmental hazards and society’s vulnerabilities are both anthropogenic as a result of a series of social, cultural, and political modifications of the environment.

Calling from this framework, the chapter is concerned much with the ways of the Porong region has been treated as a space of power contestation over times through looking at various ecological projects. This rehashes a basic assumption of political ecology saying that humans’ modifications of physical environment put into a question of how one exercises power over others by controlling their living space (Harvey 1993; Bryant and Bailey 1997). To that end the sections that follow are predominantly efforts to unravel ecological projects performed into the Porong region and show how these projects have shaped not only physical environments but also social and political lives of the

people in the region. Combining together archival readings and ethnographic data from the fieldwork, I discovered that the politicization of the region has begun since the ninth century and owing to its prospective natural and mineral resources it has been increasingly politicized during the colonial and post-colonial era marked by several major ecological modifications. And like other development projects, these modifications have been oriented in intertwined political economy interests of the government and some corporations and therefore marginalizing the need and interest of the local people (cf. Oliver-Smith 2010). In Porong, the story of marginalization of local people is manifested in so-called “local knowledges” shared within the region. The marginalization recurs in the course and aftermath of the hazardous mudflow eruption occurring since May 29, 2006. The mudflow has been a destructive environmental force to cause disruption and alteration of social lives in Porong and beyond. The chapter then is not only to describe the space of the fieldwork but also provide historical and social contexts for a more comprehensive explanation of the Lapindo case.

### **2.3. “Porong”: origin and development**

In the course of the fieldwork, I noted that my interlocutors and informants spontaneously mentioned “Porong” to designate the location of the mudflow. At first I thought that it was taken from the name of a district (*kecamatan*) in Sidoarjo regency. This conclusion is taken on the ground that according to a recent map of disaster zone released by the government in 2013 the main eruption is located in the district’s administrative area. The district is

nevertheless only one of three mud-affected districts, i.e., Tanggulangin and Jabon, in Sidoarjo, but somehow it has become the most popular name in everyday use to designate the mud-affected region. It is used not only public in general but also the victims themselves, which I found intriguing since not all of them came from Porong district. The Besuki village, where I conducted the 2012 and 2013 fieldwork, for instance, is located in Jabon district but the villagers I met used “Porong” to identify their living space.

While Porong district has been running into the most severe perceptible physical damage resulting from the mudflow, the spatiality of the term “Porong” is meant to a region of more than the district’s administrative area. It is to designate a region located in the lower Brantas River basin in the southernmost tip of the Sidoarjo regency of the East Java province, named after a river that crosses the region, the Porong River. Apparently, the river is man-made and exists only after the construction of a dam, named *Waringin Pitu* (Javanese, meaning “seven gates”), in the ninth century, to control the Brantas River, as the main river in East Java, as mentioned in the Kalagyan inscription (1037 AD) (Nurcahyo 2014, 127–128). It was also meant to overcome flooding in Surabaya as before the damming the Brantas River flowed only northwards, passing through the city. The damming resulted in the split of the river stream into two main tributaries: the Surabaya River (northwards, the original stream) and the Porong River (eastwards, the new stream) (see Map 1).

The word “porong” is originated from the Javanese “*poro*” or “*paro*” (meaning, “to split” or “to divide”) which is rooted in a prominent political event

in pre-Majapahit Java, the division of the Kahuripan Kingdom (Amig et al. 2008, 8). In 1052, the kingdom was divided into the two kingdoms of Janggala and Panjalu at the end of King Airlangga's reign (Gomperts, Haag, and Carey 2012). The aim was to bequeath the kingdom equally to both Airlangga's sons. The event forms a major part of *Nagarakretagama*, a famous work of literature written by Mpu Prapanca about King Hayam Wuruk's royal journey in 1359. The key figure in that political division was Mpu Bharada, Airlangga's political advisor. In *Nagarakretagama*, it is told that Mpu Bharada divides the island of Java using magic water from a pot that could separate the earth from west to east up to the sea, north and south (Riana 2009, 335; Slametmulyana 1979, 308). The southern region formed the Panjalu Kingdom, the center of which is now known as the town of Kediri, and the northern region formed the territory of the Janggala Kingdom, the center of which is believed to be located somewhere in the Sidoarjo regency. Although the era of the Janggala and Panjalu kingdoms was characterized by conflict and war between the two kings, Airlangga's descendants, over who would become the sole ruler of Java (Rahardjo 2011, 57), the local government of Sidoarjo is very proud to bestow some terms associated with the Janggala Kingdom in naming public places or facilities in the regency. Moreover, they are preserved as evidence of the "local identities" differentiating Sidoarjo from other regions and cities in East Java.

Indonesian historian Slametmulyana argues that the story of "magic water" in *Nagarakretagama* was adapted from the myth of Bhagiratha who made the Ganges River in India (Slametmulyana 1979, 30). The term "*bagi rata*" in Indonesian shares the same meaning with the Javanese "*poro*" or "*paro*," that

is, “to divide or to share something equally.” Thus, according to Slametmulyana, by adapting the myth the author of *Nagarakretagama* wanted to say that the boundary of the new kingdoms was a river, the Porong River, or the divider river (cf. Amig et al. 2008). Using environmental feature, especially river, as administrative and political boundary is indeed a common practice and it exemplifies the role of nature on human politics. Since the colonial era, the river has marked the administrative border of the Sidoarjo and Pasuruan regencies.

The Porong River, which is currently the main tributary of the Brantas River, has been agriculturally important in serving as the major irrigation system for the development of agriculture in the lower Brantas Basin from Mojokerto to Pasuruan with many rice and sugarcane fields being situated along its banks (Christie 2007; Fox 1993; Hefner 1990, chap. 2). Apart from rice, the Porong Basin has been famous for its sugar but it was not until the fifteenth century sugar and coffee became the flagship of agriculture in (east) Java as a result of increasing demand of such products in Europe. Whereas coffee was a success for the upland regions in Pasuruan, sugarcane (*tebu*), which was cultivated in the same fields as rice, was a success too (Hefner 1990, 41). The situation, however, changed drastically entering the nineteenth century when the Dutch were getting serious in developing sugar industries.

In 1820s, the Dutch brought new machineries to the island, established new factories, and opened new sugarcane plantations in Java, including in Porong. Moreover, they established a research center in Pasuruan regency to monitor the sugar quality in the Porong Basin. The center is still running

currently as the Research Institute for Sugar Plantations (*Balai Penelitian Perusahaan Perkebunan Gula, BP3G*). Ironically, sugar production was a total failure at that time. One of the causes was the fact that the sugarcane did not get enough, intensive water supplies during the cultivation resulting in the poor quality of the sugar produced. Many investors and managers of the sugar factories were frustrated because they experienced huge losses. Whereas the production costs had drawn quite a lot of money, the revenue was not as much as they predicted. These conditions led to the bankruptcy of many sugar factories in 1850s. Concurrently, it was also the years when the Dutch suffered from serious economic crisis in financing two different wars: against Prince Dipanegara in Java (1825-1830) and against Belgium in Europe (early 1830s). Recovering from the war in 1870 the Dutch Colonial Government issued a new Agrarian Law which marked the beginning of economic liberalism era in the archipelago (Ricklefs 2001, 161–162). The law permitted and secured the establishment of new private enterprises to cultivate agricultural plantations in the archipelago, especially in Java. Meanwhile, the government would support investors with developing infrastructures, such as transportation and irrigation.

The policy has led to major ecological alteration in Porong. According to my readings of the colonial maps of Porong,<sup>7</sup> during the second half of the nineteenth century the Dutch ran a huge development project along the Porong River. It constructed a canal redirecting the river starting from the Pejarakan village in the Jabon district eastwards toward the Madura Strait. The canal

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<sup>7</sup> The maps were available online free on the website of *Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen* (KIT, the Dutch Royal Tropical Institute) by accessing <http://maps.kit.nl>. Sadly, owing to changes in the Dutch Government's economic financial policy, the KIT library was closed down on August 1, 2013. As a result, the Institute's collections are not currently available to the public.

project let the original Porong River run dry and people now call it *Kali Mati* (Javanese, meaning “Dead River”) because it has no more water flowing in it. The canal was designed as both flood control and irrigation to support the increase in agriculture production, especially sugarcane in the Porong Basin. In addition to the construction of the canal, in the same years the Colonial Government also began railway projects to transport goods more easily from the region to the Surabaya port.

The existence of the canal did not redraw the administrative border of the Sidoarjo and Pasuruan regencies. Currently, the Indonesian Government still uses the *Kali Mati* as the natural political border between the two regencies. Nevertheless, the canal resulted in both major ecological and social change in some villages in Porong, such as the division of the Kedungcangkring and Pejarakan villages in the Jabon district, into north and south. It resulted in *Kedungcangkring Lor* and *Pejarakan Lor*, which refer to the areas located north of the canal (*lor*; Javanese, meaning “north”), and *Kedungcangkring Kidul* and *Pejarakan Kidul*, which refer to the areas located south of it (*kidul*; Javanese, meaning “south”). Many inhabitants of both villages had to travel across the canal to reach public services at the village offices on the other side of the canal. In 2008, the government included the region on the north side of the canal in the official map of mudflow disaster zone. This means Kedungcangkring Lor and Pejarakan Lor are omitted because the government would purchase land and houses in the region and compel the inhabitants to move out of their homes in order to build new mud container ponds there (announced in July 2008).

## 2.4. Knowledge and power of spatiality

This section addresses how human-nature relation in Porong and power relations in relation to spatial management and alteration of the region before the mudflow colored by the marginalization of local people's needs and interests—as also the case in other ecological projects elsewhere (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Oliver-Smith 2010). The marginalization is manifested in so-called “local knowledges” shared within the people in Porong by maintaining an idea of the subordination of local people to outsiders.

### Agriculture in Porong

Like many other rural areas in Java, in Porong we can find various versions of the mythology of Javanese rice goddess Dewi Sri circulating. In general, the main structure of the mythology is about how farming was introduced to the Javanese (Heringa 1997; Headley 2004, chap. 3). There are three major variants of the stories in Javanese villages: first, the plants were grown from a dead female ancestor or goddess; second, the seeds were gifts from a “different world” (*dunia lain*), either heaven or the underworld; and, third, humans stole the grains from heaven (van der Weijden 1981:212-213 in Heringa 1997, 368). All the variants are suggesting that the culture of farming was never initiated by the locals but rather came from their gods/goddesses.

In southern Porong, I recorded a legend of Nyi Srigati (Javanese, meaning “the lady of seedlings”) that can be summarized as follows:<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The legend I represented here is reproduced from stories I collected from villagers who live around the temple during a field trip to Gunung Gangsir village on June 17, 2012.

Long ago, the natives knew nothing about farming or agriculture. They lived as nomadic people and gathered food from the forest. There was a time when the food sources were scarce and famine struck the community. The people did not know what to do. Until one day came a woman, named Nyi Srigati, who asked the natives to pray to gods to find the solution of food scarcity. On the next day, the gods sent some sparrows, *gelatik* (Latin, *Padda oryzivora*) bringing two kinds of grains to her. She, then, planted and grew them into two kinds of plants: rice and gemstone trees. This made her very famous and wealthy, yet she was very generous to the locals. She taught the natives farming and it was the beginning of agricultural practices in the region. They called her *Mbok Randa Derma* (Javanese, meaning “the generous widow”). In commemoration of her, the locals built a temple, namely the Gunung Gangsir temple.<sup>9</sup>

The legend complies with the second version of Dewi Sri mythology. The sparrows bringing grains, which is the main character on the temple, symbolizes that the seeds were gifts from heaven. The narrative structure of the legend tries to assert a message that although the natives had been living in a fertile area, they had to wait for divine gifts and an outsider to teach them how to farm. If only one is willing to go further with the logic in explaining how industries were established in Porong, the same logic applies with agricultures. Industrial areas in Porong were introduced and developed mostly by the outsiders. Even more foreign capital was invested to develop industrial areas in the region. I will come back to discuss this issue.

In the course of the fieldwork, I also discovered an unusual variant narrative about the beginning of farming in Porong shared among people in

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<sup>9</sup> The name of the temple was taken from the village where it is located.

western Porong. Instead of telling about a rice goddess, it tells of two brothers that can be summarized as follows:

Once upon a time, there was a man, namely Jaka Walang (Javanese, meaning “the grasshopper boy”). He was born and raised by a single-mother, named Ijingan. He never knew about who his father was. One day, he asked his mother’s permission to do a “clearing of the forest” (*babad alas*). There, he built a new village named Kedung Solo<sup>10</sup> and tried to cultivate rice there. During the clearing, he caught a snake-headed fish (Javanese, *iwak kutuk*; Latin, *Channa striata*) that could speak in human language. It turned out that the fish was a cursed man.<sup>11</sup> With his power, Walang released the curse in the fish and it turned back into its original form, a human. Walang named him Jaka Pandelegan (from *deleg*, a vernacular name of the fish) and admitted him as his brother.

Later on, Pandelegan helped Walang in planting the new village. The harvest was a failure because they could not get good seeds. They went to a hermit who lived on the foot of Mount Penanggungan to ask for better seeds. The hermit refused to meet them, but the hermit’s daughters (Nyi Sangit and Nyi Angin) fell in love with their father’s guests and deliberately stole the seed from their family’s storage. Not only that, both girls sneaked away from their home to help the two men planting on their village. Knowing that his daughters had ran off, the hermit was very angry and searched for them. However, the hermit failed to convince his daughters to return home with him and eventually permitted them to marry the two young men. Then, Walang was married to Sangit and Padelegan to Angin. With the seeds they had, the couples harvested more rice than they ever expected, exceeding their communities’ subsistence needs.

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<sup>10</sup> It is also the name of the village where members of a victim group of the Renokenongo village built new resettlement. They began to reside there since June 2009. See discussion of the Renokenongo case in the chapter.

<sup>11</sup> Both in Javanese and Indonesian, *kutuk* [v] means, “to curse” and *kutukan* [n] means, “the curse.”

At the time, the Majapahit Kingdom was experiencing famine. Many paddy fields failed to be harvested because too many peasants were ill. When King Brawijaya heard about the rice production in Kedung Solo, he ordered his vizier (*patih*) to go and bring some of the harvest to the capital of Majapahit through the Porong River. When the vizier came back to the palace with the rice, the king asked, "Who owns the rice?" "Jaka Walang, the son of widow Ijingan," replied the vizier. The king recalled the widow with whom he had a relationship once. He commanded his vizier to invite Walang and his wife to the palace. When they met, the king realized that Walang was really his son. He did not want to disclose this secret, especially his past relation with Ijingan, because it would trigger a commotion across the entire kingdom.

The king persuaded the couple to live in the palace and Walang told the king about his foster brother, Pandelegan, who had been helping him all this time. The king, then, invited Pandelegan and his wife to the palace. Unexpectedly, instead of receiving the invitation the couple refused to come to the palace. It turned out that Pandelegan had known that he was an unwanted child of the king, which was also the reason why he was cursed to be a fish. Instead of obeying the king, Pandelegan led a civil disobedience of the people of Kedung Solo refusing to send more rice to Majapahit. The king considered Pandelegan as a danger for the kingdom and sent troops to arrest the couple. Knowing this, Padelegan ran and hid in the middle of rice pile where he went into thin air. Simultaneously, his wife, Angin, entered a well and also vanished.

In remembrance of the couple, the king initiated the construction of two temples: one temple, namely "*pari*" (Javanese, meaning "rice"), to mark the location where Pandelegan faded away and another temple, namely "*sumur*" (Javanese, meaning "well"), to designate the location where his

wife, Angin, disappeared. Currently, the temples are located in a village named after the temple, the Candi Pari village.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from this vernacular narrative, I also found scholarly explanations about the origin of both temples delivered by historian Denys Lombard (1987). According to Lombard, both temples were built around 1371 AD signifying the close relationship between the Majapahit and Champa kingdoms at the time. He concluded this from his analysis of the architectural design of the temples, especially the Pari Temple, which has much in common with the temples in Champa. The history of the temples is however not the main concern of this study but rather the discourse immanent in local knowledge produced based on the objects and shared within the society.

First of all, the legend interests me owing to the fact that its structure does not properly follow the general structure of Javanese rice goddess mythology. The main character of the legend is not even female, but the unwanted sons of the ruling king. Secondly, although it tells us that the seedlings came from stealing, the legend focuses more on the consequences rather than the origins of agriculture in the region. The legend suggests that the lush growth of agriculture has resulted in not only prosperity, but also conflict to the society. It demonstrates that Porong has been a fertile ground since centuries and people will easily cultivate it as long as they can get good, abundant seedlings. Such is represented in the character of the two brothers who work together hand in hand cultivating a newly opened field. As they harvested rice more than they

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<sup>12</sup> The legend is reproduced from tailoring the stories collected from villagers who live around the temples and a written narrative of the brochure of the temple during a field trip to the Candi Pari village (on June 3, 2012).

needed and even sent the surplus to other regions, new problems emerged when a higher authority as of the king of Majapahit also demanding their crops. Farming has turned into a political matter of how one party tries to control the environment of other. However as for power always stimulates counter-power, there are some people who resist the power to control them, symbolized by the character of Jaka Pandelegan refusing to send the harvest to the king. Although the rationale of the resistance is more on a personal matter (a son's revenge on his father), the legend suggests that arable soil has always been both a blessing and a curse for the people who are living in an agriculture society. Thirdly, the legend shows how the local narrate power relations between actors following the politicization of environment through a production of a popular folktale. However, instead of giving a story of people as victors, it builds an imagination of the defeat of local people by their rulers. The story of people's loss was not only detected in folktale but also occurred in the real lives, especially in the Colonial era marked by peasant rebel.

### **Peasant rebel in Sidoarjo**

Sidoarjo was to a certain degree developing as a settled region, in which almost no large-scale social and political movements or conflicts occurred. Nonetheless, in one of his historical novels, entitled *Anak Semua Bangsa* (1980; English translation, *Children of All Nations*, published by Penguin Books in 1996), the Indonesian prominent writer Pramoedya Ananta Toer illustrates the story of Trunodongso, an ordinary peasant who was planning to participate in a rebellion against a Dutch sugar factory that impinged on their land starting

from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, the colonial government heard the plan and used violence to attack the rebels. It was the moment that makes Minke, the protagonist in the novels, developed a more concrete class consciousness of his nationalism from anti-Dutch to pro-peasant (Foulcher 1981, 12–13). It seems to me that the story of Trunodongso's rebellion in the novel is a representation of an uprising that really happened in late-May 1904 in northern Porong. The uprising was led by Kasan Mukmin, a *kyai* (Islamic clerics) and leader of an affluent peasant group in the region. It ended with a success of the colonial government to suppress the rebels in a vicious battle in which Mukmin and many of his followers were killed and many more were arrested, including, perhaps, Trunodongso. Currently, the local government of Sidoarjo bestows on Kyai Mukmin by naming one main street in the town after him.

In contrast to the official colonial report that stated the prime cause of the rebellion was due to (Islamic) religious reasons of a holy war against Christianization (*Kristenisasi*) in Sidoarjo, Fernando argues that the uprising was triggered by a series of political economy reasons (Fernando 1995). Many big landowners in Sidoarjo, who were mainly Muslims, did not want to lease their land to the sugar factories because the lease rate in Sidoarjo was lower than the rate in other regencies, such as Mojokerto and Jombang. To deal with the problem, owners of sugar factories looked for political supports from local administration authorities in Sidoarjo, which were headed by a Dutch, L. A. Arends who made a new arrangement with village heads (*lurah*) in the regency. He facilitated these factories to rent paddy fields, *sawah*, in their village for a

specific period of time, with one-third of it to be cultivated under sugarcane in a given year (Fernando 1995, 251). It was the beginning of collusion between local officials, especially the village heads and the sugar factories, which became a source of frictions between many landowners and the officials owing to the officials' preference to foreign (Dutch) sugar factories instead of local people.

Another critical issue was the cropping pattern that the officials applied changed the traditional cropping cycle of the peasants. They no longer had the freedom to determine the crops they wanted to cultivate and were forced to follow a new policy to plant sugarcane in accordance to the interest of the sugar factories (Fernando 1995, 252–253). In other words, there also existed some potent frictions between the peasants and sugar factories owing to the different perspective of cropping pattern. On the one hand, the peasants were practicing a subsistence, long-term farming. On the other, the factories were aiming an intensive, short-term farming. The peasants allocated some parts of their paddies to planting sugarcane and some other parts to planting “secondary” crops, such as corn, cassava, peanut, soybean, etc. Of course, the sugar factories were not willing such practices to continue because in their viewpoint all paddies must be planted with sugarcane in order to augment the production. So, when there was a flooding over the paddies with secondary crops in September 1903 causing many peasants to harvest prematurely their crops, rumors that the local officials intentionally planned the flooding by controlling the irrigation. The rumors say that the flooding was intended to fulfill

the need of the sugar factories in advancing the planting of sugarcane into late October instead of early December (Fernando 1995, 254–256).

The rumors added to some preexisting piques of a group of Muslim peasants over the Dutch. Economic issues twisted to a religious discourse of “Christianization” (*Kristenisasi*), which was easily spread within members of the group. Before the flooding, these people had already irritated by the railway construction that has led to the desecration of several graves of their ancestors and by the use of chemical to purify the water from the canal into drinking water. These peasants’ hatred against the Dutch accumulated and manifested in a plan for uprising. The meetings were taken place in Mukmin’s house but as of more and more people gathered in order to support the plan, local officials began to receive some reports about the meeting and the plan for uprising (Fernando 1995, 259–260). The uprising began in the early morning of May 26, 1904 marked by the raising of a tricolor flag at Kebon Pasar village. By afternoon, more and more people from Sidoarjo and other regencies came to Mukmin’s house to join the rebellion. In the following morning, the rebels began to march and targeted to attack the Europeans workers in sugar factories. In the meantime, local officials had called for help from their superiors in Surabaya to send military troops, which met the rebels at a bridge on the Mangetan Canal. The first two shots from the troops made the rebels disordered and the battle resulted in the death of 38 rebels and one native official. The reinforcement went to Mukmin’s house and killed four people in the house, including Mukmin himself.

Although the figure of Kasan Mukmin (an affluent, literate, educated landowner) is a rather different from Trunodongso (a poor, illiterate, uneducated peasant) in Pramoedya's novel, the motive of the rebellion is the same: the local's resistance against the invasion of the industrialization, modernization of agriculture in their region. The rebel runs parallel with the legend of the Pari Temple discussed previously and adds another evidence in the history of the Porong region as a contested landscape owing to its arable land and strategic location. Local people are framed as victims, instead of victors of power contestation of the accumulation and intensification of space. This is however not the only marginalization occurred to the locals.

### **Brackish economy**

Paddy fields where rice and sugarcane are produced have been a primary asset in the Javanese agrarian society, but in Sidoarjo they are not the largest contributor to the economy. By 2009, 58.75 percent of the total 71,423 ha area in Sidoarjo is being used for agricultural purposes and almost half of the population (43.06 percent) is working in this sector. Ironically, in 2010 the local government of Sidoarjo claimed that rice production in the regency has no longer sufficient for its population. According to a calculation of rice production in 2008, the regency only produced 103,235.3 tons whereas the demand reached 192,363.5 tons. It means there was a shortage of 89,128.3 tons of rice in that year indicating that the regency can no longer subsist on rice production. According to the government, the decline in rice production is one consequence of the deagrarianization—the shrinking of wet paddies (*sawah*)

(Table 1)—and the changing labor patterns resulting from rapid urbanization in the region (BPS Kabupaten Sidoarjo 2010, 169–171).

*Table 1 Agricultural land in the Sidoarjo regency (in 2005 & 2009)*

Fields	2005 (ha)	2009 (ha)
Wet paddies and fields ( <i>sawah &amp; ladang</i> )	26,335	22,684
Fishponds ( <i>tambak</i> )	15,630	15,541
Agricultural land in Sidoarjo	41,965	38,225

Source: BPS Kabupaten Sidoarjo (2010: 169, 173)

*Table 2 Economic income of the Sidoarjo regency (in 2008)*

Sectors	Income (in million IDR)
Rice and other food crops (corn, cassava, etc.)	400,827.46
Stock's raising (goat, cow, chicken, etc.)	177,902.51
Plantations (sugar cane, coconut, tobacco, etc.)	174,629.03
Fisheries (shrimps & fishes)	732,553.89
Mining sectors	307,731.71
Non-mining industries	21,087,155.48
Public services (electricity & clean water)	1,017,447.27
Construction	947,816.10
Trading	11,513,582.66
Hotels and restaurants	469,828.29
Transportations	4,060,330.53
Communications	365,874.78
Finance (banks & non-banking institutions)	595,326.51
Services (private & public)	2,308,624.21
Total income	44,159,630.43

Source: BPS Kabupaten Sidoarjo (2010: 345-346)

Not all the land in Sidoarjo is agriculturally fertile for paddies. Indeed, some areas are showing a brackish soil with no source of fresh water, only salt water (*air payau*). On this area people build fishponds (*tambak*) to cultivate shrimps and various kinds of fishes. The flagships of fisheries in Sidoarjo are giant tiger prawns (Indonesian, *udang windu*; Latin, *Penaeus monodon*) and milkfish (Indonesian, *bandeng*; Latin, *Chanos chanos*). Moreover, these two species appear as the main characters on the regency's logo, along with rice stalk and sugarcane, marking the importance of fisheries to the regency. According to

the statistic, fisheries have been more profitable than other agricultural product of the regency (Table 2) and in the national level Sidoarjo accounted for almost thirty percent of Indonesia's fisheries export until 2006 (cited in Fitrianto 2012, 171).

Nonetheless, brackish area has always been marginalized in Javanese traditional agricultural society. The marginalization is manifested, for instance, in a legend of Arya Damar that I discovered in a field visit to Buncitan village in northern Porong in the course the 2012 fieldwork. The visit was at first aimed to observe a preexisting mudflow, named by the local "Kalang Anyar." There is also a small temple of Tawang Alun located adjacent to the mudflow. Located c. 20 km to the northeast of the newborn in Porong (Map 1), the Kalang Anyar mudflow does not show massive eruptions of hot mud for it only demonstrates small streams of mud flowing out from several tiny spots on the area of less than 200 square meters and it is unclear where the location of the main eruption is. From Saiful, the caretaker of the temple, I did not receive any satisfactory explanation of the connection between the temple and the mudflow. According to him, who originated from that village, both objects have already been there since the Dutch Colonial era.

Intriguingly, in his book, local environmentalist-cum-journalist Henri Nurcahyo argues that the temple was built in the era of the Majapahit reign in order "to dampen the mudflow" (Nurcahyo 2014). This argument is very problematic and very much questionable owing to the lack of archaeological evidence and historical records in proving the relation between the two objects and the fact that the book is written after the mudflow in Porong erupted.

There are some unanswered questions: Did the establishment of the temple have a connection with the adjacent mudflow? Was the temple built after or before the eruption? To address these questions further historical and archaeological investigations are needed and it is not the aim of this present study to seek answers for those questions. I am nonetheless more interested in a question of power in the legend. In the following, I will summarize and discuss the legend of Arya Damar I recorded from Saiful.<sup>13</sup>

Long ago, there was a girl, namely Putri Alun, who lived in Buncitan village. She had a very weird habit: eating human flesh. One day, Majapahit's king Brawijaya visited the village and met her. Having no information about her strange habit, the king fell in love with her. He ordered the local to build a temple as a monument of the king's love to her and name it the Tawang Alun temple (Javanese, meaning "looking at Alun"). The king took her to the palace and married her. During her pregnancy, the bizarre habit reappeared and the king began to realize it. Unexpectedly, he expelled Alun from the palace and sent her back to her village, Buncitan. She delivered the king's son in the village and named him Arya Damar (Javanese, meaning "the prince of torch").<sup>14</sup>

Damar grew up without knowing whom his father was. As of his adolescent years, he began to ask about his father but his mother refused to tell him. His grandfather, on the contrary, told him everything that had happened. Knowing that he is a son of the Majapahit king, he paid a visit to the palace and met his father demanding recognition as a prince. The king did not directly admit Damar as his child. Instead, he gave a term for Damar before he could recognize him as his child. The king ordered Damar to bring handful of soil from his origin village. If the soil were the same as the soil in

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<sup>13</sup> The legend represented here is reproduced from the story of Saiful, the caretaker of the Tawang Alun temple, during a field visit to Buncitan village. For a comparison of the legend, see Nurcahyo (2014) & Nurwicaksono (2011).

<sup>14</sup> The story of Brawijaya's son whose mother was a demon maid appears also in some other Javanese legends, who was named Jaka Damar (Florida 1995, 101–103).

the palace, then he would acknowledge Damar as his child. The king knew that the land in Buncitan would not be the same as the land in Majapahit, because it has brackish, infertile soil.<sup>15</sup> In other word, the task he gave to Damar was a subtle way to reject Damar as a prince of Majapahit. Unexpectedly, Damar brought a handful of soil with similar characteristic to the Majapahit's, fertile and not salty. The king was very surprised and still rejected to accept him as his child. Damar was very disappointed with the fact. He returned home and imprisoned himself in the Tawang Alun temple and moksha.

One thing that interests me about the legend is the fact that it does not comply with any variant of Javanese rice goddess Dewi Sri mythology. It is very understandable because it is circulated among people living in brackish area and it shows how these people are perceived as lower, marginalized class in the Javanese agricultural society. It raises then a question of the civilizing process in an agricultural society that mainly started with the beginning of farming (how humans interact with their environment) and of morality (how humans interact with other humans). According to the storyteller, since the legend ends with the king's denial to his child, it raises a question of morality: Will a civilized person rejects and wants to get rid of his (or her) own bloodline? One crucial symbol in the legend is the appearance of an anthropophagous character of Putri Alun, Arya Damar's mother. According to the legend,

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<sup>15</sup> It is the characteristic of the soil in the Buncitan village, which is similar to the soil surrounding Bledug Kesanga in Grobogan, central Java (see 5.4). From the experience visiting other mudflows in the island, I discovered the area surrounding a mudflow characterizes with similar type of soil: dry, infertile, and brackish, although it is located hundreds kilometers from the nearest beach. It is hardly to find wet paddies (*sawah basah*) in surrounding a mudflow, which is different with the situation in surrounding a "regular" volcano, such as, mounts Merapi or Semeru in Java.

anthropophagy is unacceptable in a civilized, royal, noble society therefore anthropophagus must not be living together within such a society.

It is crucial to say upfront that many scholars accepted that instead of being real an idea of human eating human (anthropophagy or “cannibals”<sup>16</sup>) is nothing but a product of imagination of the outsiders in framing the habits of the natives and legitimizing their act to civilize of the natives (Lindenbaum 2004; Arens 1979). Cannibalism validates the effort to repress the natives for they are perceived to be having a lower degree of civilization than the newcomers. Furthermore, to some extent cannibalism can be seen as a way to articulate philosophy of moral since it is often being used as an idea to maintain social stratification in the society and legitimize the civilizing process (Lindenbaum 2011). Thus, the myth cannibalism should not be interpreted literally as the act of one human eating other human, but rather as a symbol of oppression of human over other, of the civilized over the uncivilized (Lindenbaum 2004, 491–493).

As for the legend of Arya Damar is structured in a story of a child searching for his father and ends with the rejection of the father, which is similar to Javanese mythology of other mudflows in central Java (see 5.4). In the context of agriculture society, the legend can be interpreted as the struggle of people in brackish area to be accepted in the same level as peasants in a society of agriculture. However, as the legend tells us such struggles are failing. These people will always be marginalized in the traditional agricultural society owing

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<sup>16</sup> The word *cannibal* itself derived from the Spanish who mispronounced the Caribs as “canibs,” then “cannibal”; hence, it can be interpreted as the way of the Spanish framing the Caribs who resisted against them (Arens 1979, 44).

the fact that they are not poor and have a significant contribution to the society's economy.

### **The road to “Renomencil”**

A discussion of Sidoarjo's spatial development cannot be separated from a discussion of the interaction of Surabaya, the capital of East Java province, and its hinterland.<sup>17</sup> Surabaya has been a prominent port, even before the time of the Majapahit Kingdom, connecting the inland towns in Java with other ports in Southeast Asia (Silas 2002). From that time onwards it steadily developed as a major port of the archipelago from the sixteenth century until the establishment of the Dutch colonial government. According to economic historian Howard Dick, by 1905 Surabaya was still the biggest city in the archipelago, before the Dutch developed a major port in the capital city of Batavia (now Jakarta) (Dick 1993, 326–327). Up to that point, the populations of both cities were growing at the same rate. However, entering the 1920s the population of Jakarta increased twice as fast as Surabaya's and Surabaya is now the second largest city in Indonesia. Nevertheless, Dick argues that there has been no fundamental change in Surabaya's economic role in its fore- and hinterland since the Colonial era (Dick 1993, 330). Even after the change of international shipping pattern in the 1980s as a result of Singapore's location as the main port on the main trade line between Southeast Asia and Europe and North America, Surabaya port Tanjung Perak, functioning as a subsidiary

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<sup>17</sup> There is a popular name for this region of greater Surabaya: *Gerbangkertosusila* (an abbreviation of Gresik, Bangkalan, Kertosono, Surabaya, Sidoarjo, and Lamongan). It appears correspondingly with *Jabodetabek* (an acronym for Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi) referring to “the greater Jakarta.”

port, is still the main entry point for goods and commodities before they are distributed to other cities in East Java and eastern Indonesia (Dick 1993, 337). The port is also the exit point for exported commodities from Surabaya's hinterland towns in East Java.

The strategic position of Surabaya has affected the development of Sidoarjo, one of its satellite cities. Sidoarjo has to deal with the fallout from Surabaya's urban problems, such as high living costs and housing problems. Many workers, especially young families with children, cannot afford to buy a home in Surabaya. These workers need cheaper housing, but that is not too far from their workplace. Sidoarjo is the most logical region for them to find appropriate living accommodation. They can buy a home in the region by borrowing money from a bank, with a monthly installment that fits their salary, which is somewhat difficult if they buy in Surabaya. In the meantime, commuting from Sidoarjo to Surabaya only takes about thirty-to-sixty minutes by motorcycle or commuter train or an hour or two by car/bus during the rush hour.

One major political ecological project in the post-colonial Porong was the development of transportation infrastructures performed by the Central Government under the New Order regime. In the 1980s, the government began the first project of toll road between Surabaya and the highway from/to Pasuruan and Malang in the Gempol district, which passed through the middle of Porong. The project occurred at the same time with more than 500 new factories were built in southern Sidoarjo (Toer 2005, 118). The idea of the toll road was to connect the Pasuruan Industrial Estate Rembang (PIER) in

Pasuruan with the Surabaya port Tanjung Perak (Silas 2002, 683). In turn, the toll road sparked the construction of more industrial areas in southern Sidoarjo, especially in Pandaan district, Pasuruan (Guinness and Husin 1993), the growth of new settlements, formal real estates and informal self-built neighborhoods, and the extension of the urban problems surrounding them (Silas 2002). The road project was followed by other development of transportation infrastructures in Sidoarjo. In 1990, the Surabaya airport, Juanda, which is actually located in the Sidoarjo regency, was open for public (before that, it was a navy airbase). A year later, Surabaya intercity bus station Purabaya which is the largest bus station in Southeast Asia, began to operate in Bungurasih district, Sidoarjo. In February 2004, former president Megawati Soekarnoputri officially launched a commuter train, which connects Surabaya Central Station to Porong Station on the southernmost tip of Sidoarjo.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the development of such transportation infrastructures and services seem to favor Sidoarjo above Surabaya's other satellite cities, Sidoarjo has both benefitted from these transportation developments and struggled with the growth in the urban problems associated with them. There has been a big increase in built-up urban areas nevertheless the population still relies heavily on the agricultural sector for employment. While some residents commute to Surabaya everyday, most of Sidoarjo's residents depend on the agricultural sector, especially paddy and sugarcane fields and fishponds. In the meantime, the fact that more people are choosing to live and settle in Sidoarjo instead of

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<sup>18</sup> The formal name of the train released was Delta Express, however, the people and popular media used another name "Susi," an acronym for Surabaya and Sidoarjo. It was the result of a tripartite agreement between the Municipal of Surabaya, the Regency of Sidoarjo, and the Indonesian railway company (PT KAI).

in other cities around Surabaya has brought about the rapid growth of the property industry. More housing is being built, formally and informally. New shopping centers, such as Ramayana, Giant, and Matahari, and amusement parks are being constructed to meet the needs of its inhabitants so that they do not have to travel to Surabaya.

Similar to the case of the canal project that has divided villages into north and south, the toll road turned out to be the main cause for the division of more villages in Porong. One crucial division resulting from the project was what happened to the Renokenongo village that was divided into northeastern and southwestern regions. The division brought about a new region, namely *Renomencil* (Javanese, meaning “the remote Reno”), located on the southwest of the road. It was a settlement of fewer than thirty households and as the name suggests that these inhabitants was separated from the main settlement where public administrative offices and facilities of the Renokenongo village were located, on the other side of the road. The residents of Renomencil were closer to other villages, such as Siring and Mindi, which were located on the same side of the toll road. Nonetheless, the most intriguing about Renomencil is the fact that it was the location where Lapindo drilled the controversial natural gas exploration well of Banjar Panji 1 for it has always been linked to the mudflow (see 4.4 & 4.5).

Lapindo obtained the location for the drilling with the help of Renokenongo village head (*lurah*), Mahmudatul Fatchiyah, after failing to find a site in two other adjacent villages (Siring and Jatirejo) because the villagers in those villages rejected the drilling of a natural gas exploration well in “their backyard”

(Batubara and Utomo 2012, 76). In the course of obtaining the land in Renomencil, no one from Lapindo directly presented the company's natural gas exploration plan to the villagers. It was depending only on the authority of Mahmudatul as Renokenongo's village head in negotiating with the landowners. What is more, even when the company started the drilling, many villagers still thought that it was not for a natural gas exploration but chicken poultry instead (Batubara and Utomo 2012, 76; Ahmady et al. 2010, 165–166). According to my own interviews with former residents of Renomencil, the land for the drilling of Banjar Panji 1 well belonged to Mahmudatul's relatives who were living in the main settlement of the village, on the other side of the toll road. They rarely cultivated their land in Renomencil because of physical boundary of the toll road. It was very logical and practical if the landowners would take any offer to make a profit from their unproductive land in Renomencil (cf. Batubara and Utomo 2012, 74–79).

## **2.5. An unnatural mudflow**

At this point, we can see that ecological projects and “local knowledges” shared in Porong have marginalized local people. They are the ones who have never won and became the victors in the battle of power over their land. Their presence is always subordinate to others from outside who come to occupy their land and modify it without considering their need and interest. The series of defeats to defend their land had brought them in a more dangerous state that they ever imagined from the birth of an unnatural mudflow.

The first eruption of hot mud and stinky gas was detected from the middle of paddy field in the Siring village, located about only 150-200 meters from the Banjar Panji 1 natural gas exploration well, on May 29, 2006. It was less than four months after Lapindo began drilling the well (on March 9, 2006). The first eruptions were about forty-to-fifty meters high and with a temperature of 70 degree Celsius. Everyday since about 7,000-to-150,000 meter cubic of mud flows out from the earth's belly. In the beginning of the eruption, for the purpose of "to not disturb the public" (*agar tidak meresahkan masyarakat*) there was an internal negotiation within Lapindo's representatives to decide that the published number for the media was only 25,000 meter cubic of mudflow per day (Saputra 2006f). In the first three weeks, the mudflow had inundated an area of ninety hectares of land and resettlements and evicted more than 2,000 inhabitants in that area (Saputra 2006c). In only a month, the engulfed area had grown larger, up to an area of 145 hectare and forcedly displaced more people from their home (Saputra 2006e). By September 2006, the mudflow spread over an area of 240 hectare (Normile 2006) and in December 2006 the drowned area were doubled, up to 450 hectare, especially after the explosion of an underground gas pipeline in the northeastern (on November 22, 2006) (McDonald and Widaningrum 2009, 1103). To date the mud flowing from the earth's belly has engulfed at least 15 villages in three districts and led to the eviction of thousands of inhabitants.

Since the eruption, the environmental quality in Porong has been degrading significantly. In the course of the 2012 and 2013 fieldwork, for instance, I was a witness of how difficult was for the villagers to get clean,

consumable water. We can no longer consume the groundwater from the wells and it can only be used for bathing, washing, and latrines with side effects causing itching of the skin. For cooking, the villagers relied on the supply of clean water from outside the region. Every morning and afternoon, people waited in line to buy clean water from the nearest water reservoirs, which were independently managed by a few people. Twice a day a tanker truck full of water catered those reservoirs with clean water taken from the springs of Mount Arjuno in Pasuruan. For drinking water, the villagers are consuming bottled water or refilled water gallons from a stall in the neighboring villages. The difficulty of getting clean water in the community has been a supplementary to the increase of society's vulnerability.

Some geologists calculated that the area surrounding the mud-volcano has been subsiding about 5.5 centimeter per day (Abidin et al. 2009) and as a result of the subsidence the area surrounding the main eruption has experienced land cracking and building fracturing which I observed during the fieldwork. According to a government report released in September 2008, there were about ninety eight small mud or flammable gas eruption spots, which fifty of them were found wildly active (DRE 2008). In 2011, a team of geologists predicts that the mudflow will continue to occur with the same rate for the next three decades (Davies et al. 2011). Additionally, according to Richard Davies, a professor of petroleum geology at the Durham University, closing the main vent, if it had been successful, would lead to another eruption elsewhere (personal email communication, July 19, 2012). From numerous

talks with victim-informants, the worst scenario they ever imagine is a sudden land collapse due to the empty space in the underground.

The mudflow turns out to be the largest “mud-volcano”<sup>19</sup> on earth (Davies et al. 2007; Mazzini et al. 2007; Istadi et al. 2012) and the first of its kind to be perceived as “disaster.” The mudflow and its potent hazards and risks (land subsidence and cracking, land collapse, wild flammable gas bursts, polluted groundwater and air) have become destructive environmental forces to the local people in Porong and demolishing major public infrastructures in the surrounding. One major issue for the central and provincial government is the fact that the mudflow disconnected the toll road causing serious economic problems in local and nation level for there has been a huge disruption to the transportation of goods and people from/to Surabaya and to/from eastern and southern regions in East Java and Bali with the absence of the road. The expedition enterprises were complaining about spending extra delivery costs up to IDR 600,000 (c. USD 70) per container because they had to reroute the travel (McMichael 2009, 76).

Yet, there has been no exact number of the economic losses resulting from the disaster, although some institutions have tried to calculate it. The data from the National Statistic Bureau (BPS), for instance, showed that Sidoarjo has been the regency which suffered the most due to the disaster, marked by a significant drop of the regency’s economic growth, from 6.7 percent in 2005 to 4.6 percent in 2006 (cited in McMichael 2009, 77). At least, ten factories had

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<sup>19</sup> The scientific, geological term of such phenomena is “mud-volcano” (*gunung lumpur*), but in this study I am using the term “mudflow” (*luapan lumpur*) on the grounds that in the course of the fieldwork the former term is not familiar among my interlocutors and informants.

stopped their activities causing to more than 1,800 people jobless (Saputra 2006d; Ahmady et al. 2010) and economic disruption has also detected in other regions in East Java, such as Malang, Pasuruan, and Probolinggo, where major industries are located. According to the Indonesian Audit Body (BPK), the total economic losses of the first year of the mudflow were no less than 30 trillion rupiah whereas the economic growth would be obstructed for quite some years ahead (BPK 2007).

*Table 3 Mud-flooded agricultural fields, by May 2007 (in hectare)*

District	Village	Sugarcane	Paddy	Others crop	Total
Porong	Siring		22.25		22.25
	Renokenongo	7.79	67.35		75.14
	Jatirejo	5.63	29.60		35.23
	Mindi	17.30	10.00		27.30
	Ketapang			4.0	4.00
Tanggulangin	Kedungbendo		3.50		3.50
	Sentul		25.00		25.00
Jabon	Pejarakan	17.60	36.00		53.60
	Besuki	3.00	79.00		82.00
	Kedungcangkring	12.70	27.00		39.70
Total		64.02	299.70	4.0	367,72

Source: BPK (2007: 228-229)

Over the first year of the mudflow there was more than two hundred hectares of paddy fields and sixty hectares of sugarcane fields swept by the mudflow (BPK 2007, 19, 228–229; see Table 3) and more agricultural fields become unproductive owing to the immersion of irrigation systems to supply other regions. Additionally, the data from the Office of Fisheries and Marine of Sidoarjo indicated a significant drop in the fisheries production in three mud-affected districts (Porong, Tanggulangin, and Jabon), from 7,338.5 tons in 2007 to 5,467.2 tons in 2008, contributing to a negative 24.81 percent in fisheries production growth of the whole regency in 2008 (cited in Fitrianto

2012, 171). One cause of this decline is the spilling of mudflow that contains hazardous substances into the Madura Strait through the Porong Canal. According to some independent studies, the mud consists of heavy metals essences that have polluted the groundwater and soil in surrounding the mudflow (Plumlee et al. 2008; Juniawan, Rumhayati, and Ismuyanto 2012) and therefore the spilling of mudflow has caused to supplementary surface and subsurface pollution along the canal and in its estuary (Nusantara 2010).

The Indonesian Ministry for Environment estimated, by August 2007 the total loss was up to 28.3 billion rupiah including infrastructure damage and production losses in the provincial level (McMichael 2009, 79). The number can be more astounding if there is a calculation to the deprivation in middle- and microeconomic sectors in the region. The transportation obstacles have direct impact on the leather craft home-industries in the Tanggulangin district marked by the declining numbers of visitors to the region, in addition to a rivalry with imported products from China. By the end of June 2006, it was recorded that at least forty home industries of leathers had to stop their production and in just a year only eight industries survived (Batubara and Utomo 2012, 27–28). Theoretically, these industries do not only need more time to restore from the crisis, but they also need extra time to catch up with the normal progress (Cernea 2003). Still, no governmental or non-governmental organization has done specific measurements of economic losses in these sectors and designed strategies to deal with it.

Another marginal issue in regards of the impact of the mudflow has been the loss of education facilities. The National Development Planning (*Bappenas*)

reported that by the first year the mudflow inundated thirty public schools, ranging from elementary to senior level, and two Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) in the region (Bappenas 2007). The government has no plan to relocate these public schools, meanwhile the organizers of Islamic schools used their personal compensation money to independently relocate their educational facilities in various places. Currently, other schools in the vicinity of the disaster zone are experiencing a crisis of students following the large-scale migration of victims to other regions. Apart from the mudflow impact on local and national economy, thousands of inhabitants lost their home. These people were forcibly displaced by the mudflow and had to find new dwellings and rebuild a new life. Thus, if the previous ecological projects (the river, the canal, and toll road) lead to the division of some communities, the mudflow scatters the people.

## **2.6. Scattering community**

To date the mudflow has not come to an end. Nonetheless, the social and ecological crisis is now entering a dormant state and the social tension in Porong is not as high as in the first five years of the eruption. One of the factors is that most victims have already started new lives in their new dwellings, although not all of them have fully been compensated. The mudflow has resulted in the formation of new social groups in Porong, i.e., the “inside map” and “outside map” victims, and the “non-victims.”

### **The “inside map” victims**

The “inside map” victims (*korban dalam peta*) is meant to name a group of victims whose land and houses are included in the map of “impacted area” (*peta area terdampak*) released by the central government on March 22, 2007. Members of the group are receiving compensation money from Lapindo following the issuance of a presidential regulation (No. 14 of 2007). The amount that each victim receives may vary on the grounds that it was calculated based on victims’ individual possession of land and buildings. The compensation rates are one million rupiah per square meter of dry land (*tanah kering*), one-and-half million rupiah per square meter of buildings and 120,000 per square meter of wet paddies (*sawah basah*) as mentioned in Lapindo’s letter on December 4, 2006 (see discussion on the victimization and compensation in 3.4). According to the presidential regulation, Lapindo should pay its obligation to the victims in two periods, 20 percent down payment (subsequent to the issuance of the regulation in April 2007) and 80 percent of the remaining at once in no less than two years after the first payment due.

To handle the transaction, Lapindo set up a new subsidiary, namely Minarak Lapindo Jaya (publicly known as and thenceforth, “Minarak”). The establishment of a new company is due to the fact that Lapindo is registered as an American-based company and according to the Agrarian Law (No. 5 of 1960) foreign company is not allowed to purchase and own land in Indonesia. Ahead of the second payment deadline, Minarak brought up an alternative transaction option by offering the victims to barter their remaining compensation money with new houses in Kahuripan Nirvana Village (KNV), a

housing managed by PT Mutiara Mashur Sejahtera (MMS). MMS is a real estate business under the umbrella of Bakrieland, which is listed as another subsidiary of Lapindo's parent company, the Bakrie & Brothers. Using a claim that a legal land and building transaction required certificates of land and buildings released by the National Land Body (BPN), Minarak urged victims without certificates to accept the barter option. In return, each victim will receive a unit of house in KNV with some conditions: if the residual value of the compensation that has not been paid is greater than the value of one unit house in KNV, the victim would get margin money back; but, if the value is smaller than the price of the house, the victim had to pay for the shortfall to Minarak or MMS. To accommodate the diverse value of victims' compensation, Minarak offered different types of houses in KNV, with ranging price between 36 million and 70 million rupiah per unit.

Whereas some victims rejected the offer and demanded Lapindo to disburse the remaining payment in cash at once, many victims accepted it after a long negotiation, which was mediated by a populist East Javanese cultural and Islamic religious leader, Emha Ainun Najib (publicly known as "Cak Nun"). Consequently, the "inside map" group is split again into two groups: those who rejected Minarak's offer and those who took the offer. The first group is called the "cash and carry" group, while the latter the "cash and resettlement" group.<sup>20</sup>

To deal with the first group, Minarak declared its inability to pay the remaining in cash at once and decided to disburse monthly installments of 30

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<sup>20</sup> These names are originally in English.

million rupiah per certificate starting from December 2008. The statement changed shortly in February 2009 when the company claimed only capable to make payment in monthly installments of 15 million rupiah per certificate. The global economic crisis was blamed for such a situation. While most victims argued that Lapindo has clearly violated the presidential regulation, they could not do anything much about it. They have done public hearings with parliament, legal actions to the supreme and constitutional courts, street protests and demonstrations, but the government seems blind to their conditions. Such a situation raises a serious question of how the role of the government in guarantying the compensation payment of disaster victims (cf. Sugarman 2007) because it never disciplines Lapindo for disobeying its regulation and there has been no bright solution to resolve the postponing of compensation payment to the victims. Instead of ensuring the compensation payment, the permissiveness of the government has been the evidence of Lapindo's strong position in bargaining its power in the national politics (see chapters 4 & 5). And, once again, the victims are at stake.

The victims of cash and resettlement are facing different problem in obtaining certificates of their new properties in KNV. Most victims have yet to receive the certificate for their land and houses in KNV. As of April 2014 Minarak had only released 75 land certificates of 2,151 certificates that should be given to the victims (Suprpto and Martudji 2014). In many cases, the victims' motive to accept this option was based more on pragmatic reason for they did not want to be enmeshed in a complicated, bureaucratic paperwork with either Lapindo/Minarak or the government. Therefore, they took any

proposal from Lapindo/Minarak even though it was not cash money but house instead. Subsequent to having the house they intended to sell it to someone else. One victim's family said in an interview that they eventually accepted the offer to relocate in KNV because they did not want to be kinked in getting the compensation. They felt that living in KNV is "too modern" (*terlalu modern*) and with the money from selling the house they planned to buy a house in hamlet (*rumah kampung*), where they could raise livestock (e.g., chickens, goats, or cows) and do subsistence farming. It seemed that Minarak suspected such motives and forced victims to sign an agreement that allows them to sell the house only after one year they moved in. Another efficient strategy that Minarak undertakes is postponing the handover of the certificate because the victims could not sell the house to a third party without it, but they can sell it back to Minarak at a lower price. Relied on the information from various talks with activist-interlocutors, there has been a spreading rumor that Minarak had to use the certificate of land and houses in KNV as collateral to borrow money from bank with which Minarak used to pay the victims of the first group. However, it is very difficult to trace the sources of the money that Minarak disbursed to the victims.

### **The "outside map" victims**

A second victim group consists of those whose land and houses are included in the "uninhabitable area" (*area tidak layak huni*) (released gradually in 2008, 2009, 2012, and 2013; see the discussion about the enlargement of mudflow disaster zone in 3.5). The group is called the "outside map" victim

(*korban luar peta*) and its members receive compensation money from the government instead of Lapindo. Although the government applies the same rate for calculating the compensation of these victims, to a certain degree their condition is much better than those who are borne by Lapindo. Unlike the company that applies a double-standard mechanism to recompense the “inside map” victims (by offering alternative option of resettlement to KNV), the government purchases the land and buildings of the “outside map” victims without questioning the legal status of the assets. Consequently, the payment by the government has been more steadily given compared to the payment by Lapindo. Whereas many the “cash and carry” victims are still waiting for monthly installments from Lapindo, the government has completed to indemnify most “outside map” victims.

The different treatment has evoked social envy of the “inside map” victims to the “outside map” victims. In mid-May 2013, for instance, I witnessed a quarrel between two male victims, one was an “outside map” victim from Besuki village and the other was an “inside map” victim from Renokenongo village. At the time, the Renokenongo villager was waiting for Lapindo to complete the remaining compensation and the Besuki villager had just received the initial down payment of compensation from the government. They were arguing loudly and emotionally about two different viewpoints to claim of “who is the true victim of this disaster.” According to the Renokenongo villager, his counterpart could not be accounted as a true victim by bringing up the issue that he was not only losing his belongings but most of his time urging Lapindo to disburse the remaining compensation. The Besuki villager

confronted that argument by raising the fact that he had been living in uncertainty for six years just to get an official status as “a victim.” Without the status he could not have the rights to get compensation from what he had been losing. The quarrel ended with a mutual understanding that they are essentially victims of the government’s indecisiveness in dealing with the mudflow and especially Lapindo. To that end, both define themselves as victims of human politics rather than an environmental disaster.

### **The “non-victims”**

The third social group consists of people who are living in the surrounding of disaster zone and I call this group the “non-victims.” Members of this group are living in a deteriorating environment without a legal status as “victims.” As a consequence, they are not entitled to be recompensed by the government and/or Lapindo for living in degraded environment. However, not everybody I met wanted to be included as new victims. One reason appeared to be that they did not want to leave their village. Some even said that they would rather die in their villages than to die not in their homes. Apart from the issue of humans’ bonds with their land (Oliver-Smith 2010, chap. 6), I discovered that such a reasoning came mostly from the experience of previous victims who were facing difficulties to be integrated into new communities.

Currently, there is a specific term to label the mudflow victims, i.e., *wong lumpur* (Javanese, meaning “mud people”). It has been circulating among the people in Porong as a manifestation of the non-victims’ social envy of the mudflow victims. They stereotype the victims as “the rich and protester” (*orang*

*kaya dan tukang protes*) for they had received a lot of money from the compensation but still frequently disturbing the society by conducting street protests and demonstrations.<sup>21</sup> The stereotyping has led to sociocultural problems to the victims' integration in their new resettlements. I frequently received information from my informants concerning the rejection of the non-victim group to bury a deceased mudflow victim in the public graveyard of the new resettlement. Moreover, not every local muezzin desired to lead prayers if the deceased was a mudflow victim because they never consider the victim to be their responsibility. When such a situation happened the family would call the muezzin from their origin village who may have moved to a different village or district. They also searched for any cemetery that would accept the funeral. Some Besuki villagers were quite lucky that they could still use the remaining graveyard in their former, abandoned village to bury their deceased family's member although they may have lived in distant places.

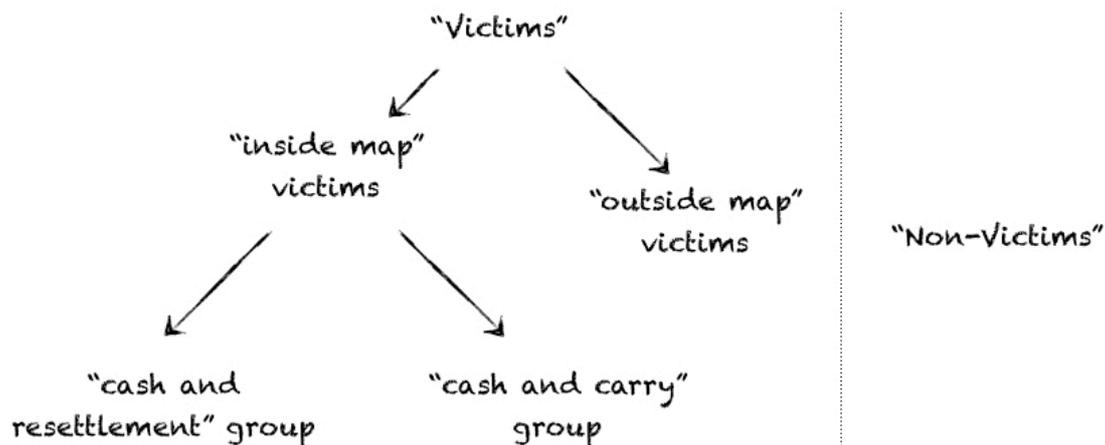


Fig. 2.2 Social formations in Porong following the mudflow hazard (adapted from field notes)

<sup>21</sup> I am indebted to Lutfi Amiruddin for bringing up the stereotyping.

## **2.7. Maintaining power relations through collective resettlement**

Post-eviction social problems have spawned anxieties in relation to maintain power relations among victims. Following Quarantelli, I differ “anxiety” from “panic.” Panics, according to him, “occur following crises in which the danger is defined as an immediate and potential threat to the bodily self” and manifest in “non-social” and “non-rational” behaviors (Quarantelli 1954, 273). By “non-social” he means the behavior intended for the sake of the safety of the individual him/herself, without a concern in interfering with the others, and by “non-rational” is for it is taken spontaneously, immediate or reflex, without any consideration that such might harm the actor and/or other people. Within the framework, I therefore understand “anxiety” as a psychological state that emerges after someone has learnt the inevitable consequences that might suffer him/her. In this sense, whereas panic is caused by one’s nescience, anxiety is socially constructed through one’s knowledge about what will happen to him/her. Hence, unlike panic, anxiety will trigger rational and social behaviors, the behaviors that are always related to power struggles.

In the course and aftermath of the mudflow hazard, the shadow of displacement and disintegration has been one source of anxiety among people in Porong. To deal with the displacement there are two strategies implemented: individual relocation and collective resettlement. In practice, the former is less complicated than the latter. It is usually because the support of a sufficient social capital of victims’ family or kinship owing to the fact that most individual relocations depend on familial factors. These victims tend to move into their relatives or a location near their kin.

Collective resettlement, on the contrary, has been colored by various strategies to maintain power relations in a community, which is aimed not only to deal with the anxiety of displacement but also the realm of disintegration. Apart from the problematic collective resettling initiated and organized by Minarak to KNV, I noted some victims also organize such an idea. The role of community leaders (*tokoh*) is required to proceed with such an idea and collective resettlement has been a crucial process to probe the endurance of social structures of a community, as I will show in two case studies of Renokenongo and Besuki villages in the following.

### **The Renokenongo case**

The mudflow hazard has positioned Renokenongo villagers into the inside map victim group. Although the mudflow began to erupt in late-May 2006, most Renokenongo villagers were saved owing to the existence of the toll road. It was because the eruption was located on the west side of the road and they were living on the other side of the road. Additionally, the government's intention to secure national and provincial economy by protecting the road from the mudflow was the main factor for these villagers' safety. The embanking project on the east side of the eruption resulted in the redirecting of the mudflow to the western and southern regions instead of flowing to Renokenongo main settlement in the east. As a result, while people of other villages on the west of the road, such as Siring, Kedungbendo and Jatirejo, had evacuated to the Pasar Baru Porong during the first months of the eruption, most Renokenongo villagers were still living in their homes with a

high level of anxiety. Some early Renokenongo victims from Renomencil, Wangkal, and Balongnongo hamlets living in the west side of the road, stayed a while in Renokenongo village hall (*balai desa*) that had been modified as a temporary refugee camp.

As of October 2006 these early mudflow victims received two-year house rent aid from Lapindo, so they departed from the refugee camps. However, a huge explosion of underground gas pipeline along the toll road (occurred on the night of November 22, 2006) caused the collapse of the east embankments. The main settlement of Renokenongo and a highly populated housing, namely *Perumtas* (abbreviated from Perumahan Tanggulangin Asri Sejahtera) could not escape from the mudflow danger anymore. Most inhabitants evacuated to and inhabited the newly emptied Pasar Baru Porong. A few days after the explosion (on December 4, 2006), Lapindo announced its willingness to purchase land and buildings from the victims and excluded the Renokenongo and *Perumtas* regions. Victims from these regions organized themselves into several groups to negotiate with Lapindo and the government in order to include them as the “official” victims too.

The negotiation was a success marked with the release of the map of impacted area (on March 22, 2007) and the issuance of a presidential regulation (No. 14 of 2007) obligating Lapindo to recompense them as mudflow victims. Surprisingly, instead of accepting the regulation, many villagers of Renokenongo established and gathered in a new group, namely *Pagar Rekontrak* (abbreviated from *Paguyuban Warga Renokenongo Menolak Kontrak*; literally translated as, “association of Renokenongo villagers against

contract [of transaction]”). As the name suggested, the group consisted of victims who resisted signing the contract of compensation with Lapindo. The group raised two objections: first, Lapindo should pay the compensation at once without installments and secondly, Lapindo should also indemnify them for immaterial losses apart from the material damages in amount of one billion rupiah per family. Lapindo’s response was quite predictable: it ignored them. Eventually, starting from September 2008 the group’s members agreed to sign the contract with Lapindo and changed the group name to *Pagar Rekorlap* (abbreviated from *Paguyuban Warga Renokenongo Korban Lapindo*; literally translated as, “association of Renokenongo villagers, victims of Lapindo”). In due course, the members of the group inhabited the refugee camp of Pasar Baru Porong. In mid-2009, some members of the group had received the initial payment from Lapindo. Though they have already rented house elsewhere, they were still dwelling in the camp and only occasionally visited the house. It was meant as a strategy to maintain solidarity among the group’s members and to consolidate their plan for collective resettlement.

Subsequent to the initial payment from Lapindo, the group’s leaders collected the money from their members in order to purchase new land for their resettlement, with additional money they borrowed from a local businessman. After conducting several surveys, they decided to use the money to buy an ex-sugarcane field in the village of Kedung Solo. There are some considerations why they chose this location. First, the price matched with their money. Second, the location is not too far from their previous village. Third, it is located near the new artery and toll road. Fourth, it is still in rural

area which is why they rejected the relocation to KNV for they saw it as “too urban” (*terlalu kota*). As of June 2009 they began to dwell in the new resettlement they name it *Renojoyo* (Javanese, meaning “the glorious Reno”).

Renokenongo’s rejection to sign contracts of compensation with Lapindo juxtaposes the fact that Lapindo/Minarak precluded victims with insufficient land and buildings certificates. At first, one could spontaneously interpret the rejection as a strategy to resist Lapindo. But later on I discovered that it was an effort to maintain power relations between local leaders (*tokoh*) and their subjects, representing a common patron-client relationship in many Javanese societies (B. Anderson 2007). In Renokenongo, community leaders are mainly major landowners and similar to other villagers they do not possess a proper certificate for their assets. One local leader I met in 2009 claimed that his land asset was worth more than five billion rupiah following own calculation of the compensation. For he did not possess the certificate of the land, he was very anxious that Minarak would not give him anything since the company would only compensate victim with certificate and push him to choose the KNV option where he will have to live with new people from other villages. Together with other local leaders of Renokenongo, he gathered people with similar problem of certificate dispossession and maintained the idea of collective resettlement as if it is the need of the Renokenongo villagers. He believed that by establishing a victim group he would have a more strategic position to bargain with Lapindo and the government rather than if he did it all alone.

The current arrangement of Renojoyo is evidence of how these local leaders have been sustaining power relations within the community. The

houses of these leaders occupy the main street of the resettlement, whereas the houses of ordinary people are located in side streets, behind their leaders. Such an emplacement is contrary to the initial agreement in 2009, of which some leaders informed me that the land lots (*kapling*) in the new resettlement would be decided by a lottery. However, in the 2010 fieldwork, I discovered that some leaders who received a lot of compensation money wanted to take more than one land lot in a contiguous ground and therefore the lottery was an obstacle for them to fulfill their desires. To deal with this they executed some strategies, such as personal lobbying to some villagers to switch lots, luring them with some money, and spreading an issue that if the villagers insisting with the lottery's result it will hinder the land titling.

The Renokenongo case presents collective resettlement as not only a strategy to cope with the anxiety of displacement and disintegration of a community. It is also aimed to maintain power relations between local leaders and their followers in the community since collective resettlement will bring also these preexisting relations to the new resettlement.

### **The Besuki case**

The will to maintain power relations among the community also appeared in collective resettling of the Besuki villagers. Though the same motive of maintaining power relations has been coloring the migration, instead of moving to a single location Besuki villagers migrated communally into separate locations following the preexisting competitions among local leaders in the village.

The impact of the mudflow first came to the village in August 2006 when it swept some paddy fields of the village resulting in a stalled, unproductive land. The Besuki villagers can be classified as the “outside map” victims however the victimization of the village occurred in two phases owing to the existence of the toll road that divided it since 1980s. According to the data from autobiographical memories of the villagers, in the area where the road exists, there were schools, mosques and houses. The project did not only cause those buildings to be demolished, but also separating the village into two hamlets: “Besuki Barat” (*barat*; Indonesian, “west”) and “Besuki Timur” (*timur*; Indonesian, “east”). In practice, the road functioned as both a natural and social border, creating physical and psychological distance between two different areas of inhabitation—similar to the case of Porong River and Canal. Administratively, both regions were still under the same village governance, but the existence of the road as a physical border determined social interactions between villagers living on each side of it. Although the government had built a bridge connecting both areas to enable villagers to cross the toll road, it did not work as well as it was supposed to. Consequently, the social lives of those living in the Besuki village changed significantly. Some religious routines had to be managed differently. The women’s *Diba’an*,<sup>22</sup> for instance, had to stop because the participants were too afraid to cross the bridge in the dark. Some villagers took the initiative and dismantled the barbed wire fence, which was installed between the highway and the settlements, so that they could cross

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<sup>22</sup> *Diba’an* is a prayer and reading of the *Shalawat* of the Prophet Muhammad in a group. The book read is the Book of Diba’. In the Besuki village, there were three *Diba’an* groups, one for men, one for women, and one for girls.

directly on the road. This action triggered the construction of concrete walls along the road in 1995. The walls were meant so the villagers could not see the lights of the neighborhoods across the road. Villagers began using the bridge again for a while before they dismantled some parts of the walls to make it easier to cross on foot. Motorcyclists used the bridge, but cyclists and pedestrians preferred to cross the road itself.

The toll road was a major factor in determining the victimization of the Besuki in two phases. The first phase of victimization occurred in mid-2008 following the issuance of a president regulation (No. 48 of 2008). The regulation only included the region on the west side of the road, the Besuki Barat. The decision was triggered by the collapse of the southern embankment resulting in the mud flowing to Besuki Barat. At the time, the villagers could not flee to the refugee camp in Pasar Baru Porong because it was still occupied by the people of Pagar Rekontrak (see Renokenongo case above) and as a consequence the villagers had to build impermanent shacks on the dysfunctional toll road. As of the government disbursed the evacuation and house-rent aids as well as six-month living allowances, these people began to search for new dwellings. It happened concurrent with the government's plan to build supplementary mud containers on the southern of the main eruption (see chapter 3).

The 2008 regulation included only villagers of Besuki Barat and therefore excluded Besuki Timur villagers from the victimization. Many Besuki Timur villagers were very disappointed with this decision because they felt deserted to live in a gradually degrading environment on the eastern side of the road.

The disappointment was manifested in the establishment of several victim groups that were aimed to force the government to include Besuki Timur into the disaster zone, but none of these groups lasted long. There were at least three different groups: *Pagar Betis* (abbreviated from *Paguyuban Besuki Timur Siaga*; “society of Besuki Timur alert”), *BKL* (abbreviated from *Besuki Korban Lumpur*; “mudflow victims of Besuki”), and *Tim 7* (or “team of seven,” which was the total of remaining neighborhood association (*rukun tetangga*) in Besuki Timur). As of April 2012, in line with the issuance of another presidential regulation (No. 37 of 2012), the government announced a new map of “uninhabitable area,” which included the area of Besuki Timur in the new mudflow disaster zone. The regulation marked a second phase of victimization of Besuki villagers and for this reason the government would purchase all land and houses in the village and compel the villagers to move to new settlements within two years following this decision.

The victimization of Besuki villagers in two phases has unearthed preexisting, latent conflicts between local leaders, the conflicts that were followed by the division of villagers into several groups.<sup>23</sup> As a result most Besuki villagers chose to resettle collectively in separate locations following different leaders, respectively. Many villagers argued that the reason they

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<sup>23</sup> Apart from internal conflicts, the Besuki villagers also experienced external conflicts with other villages. Among these conflicts was between the Besuki and the Renokenongo occurring in July 2006. The conflict was triggered by the government’s plan to build supplementary embankments in the northeast in order to secure the toll road. Such an action meant to the mudflow would be redirected to the Besuki village instead of the Renokenongo village. Obviously, the Besuki villagers demanded the government to build embankments in the south too so that the mudflow would not sweep their village. On the contrary, according to the Renokenongo villagers, such an embankment would lead the mud flowing to their village. While the conflict intensified, the explosion of underground gas pipeline (on November 22, 2006) has made the villagers of each village too busy to secure their selves and belongings.

chose to move into the new location was because they were following “the words of the leaders” (*kata para tokoh*). One popular leader, who was the chief of *pesantren* Darul Ulum in Besuki Barat, managed independent relocation of his educational facility to Pangreh village, Jabon district, Sidoarjo, which was followed by a large group of Besuki villagers. Another small group of villagers resettled in a different location tailing one religious leader who moved to Dukuh Sari village in the same district with the previous group. The tendency to jointly resettle in these two villages also happens to Besuki Timur villagers because they wanted to live in a neighborhood where they still can meet up with their old neighbors. I discovered one local leader organized the resettling of about sixty families of Besuki Barat onto the Ngering village, Gempol, Pasuruan, but he did not move together with them to reside in that place.

The Besuki case shows a different state from the Renokenongo case. Whereas in the Renokenongo case local leaders (*para tokoh*) united to maintain the idea of collective resettling and managed to actualize it, local leaders of Besuki were competing with each other in gathering villagers who were willing to follow each of them onto new locations, respectively. The disintegration of the village stems from the conflicts among their local leaders. However, like the Renokenongo case, the Besuki case also proves a tendency of the idea of collective resettlement is used as an effective strategy to maintain power relations between local leaders and their subjects. This does not only mean that these leaders aspire to prolong their dominance over their followers but also that many villagers felt safe and secure when they stick with some persons who could provide them certainty. Collective resettlement is therefore

not only a strategy of victims to cope with the anxiety of displacement and society's disintegration, but also a mean to maintain power relations within them.

## **2.8. Porong, a space for living and a living space**

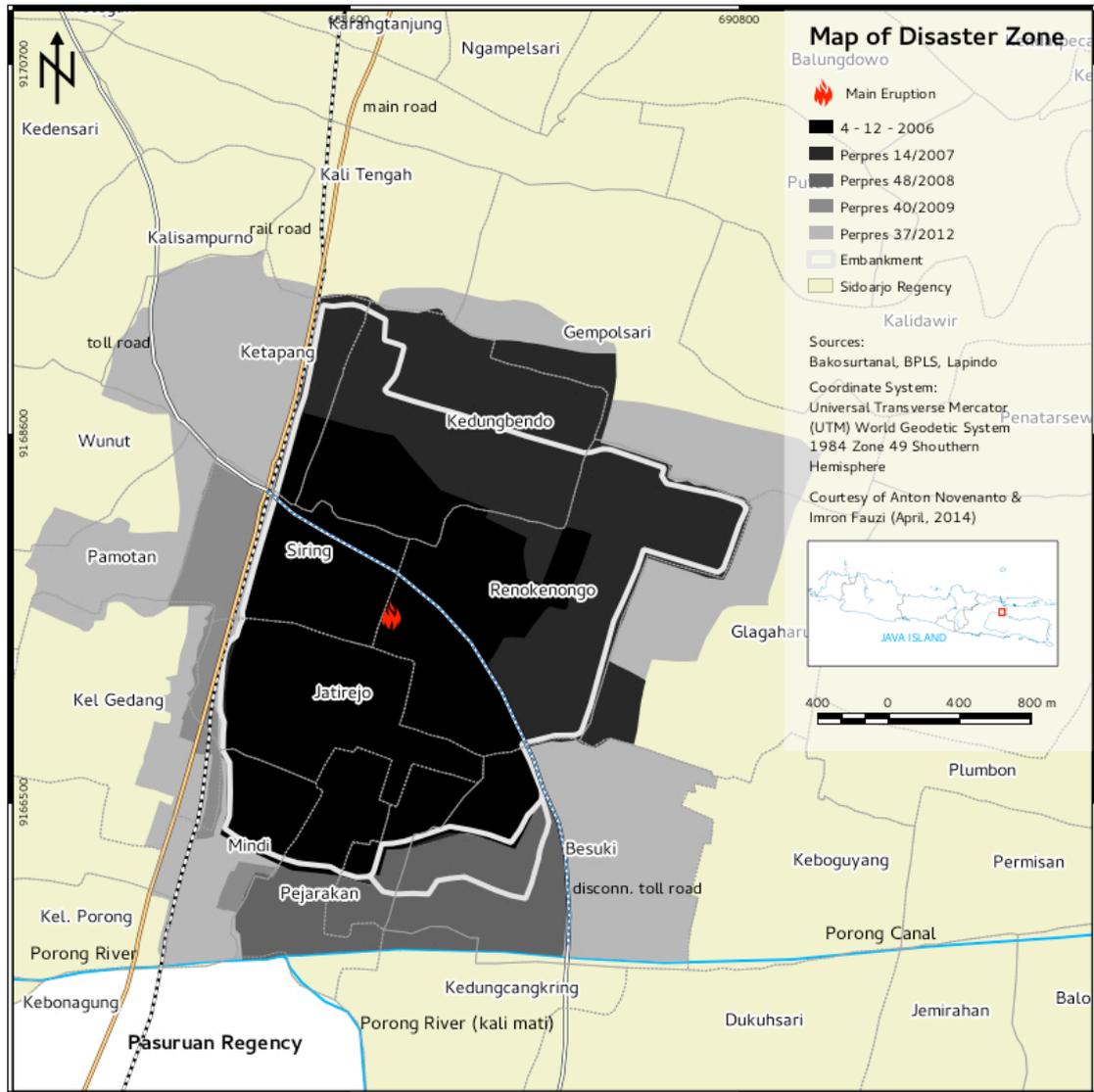
In the course of introducing the space of this study's fieldwork, the chapter explores historical, social, and cultural contexts that have been shaping the people and environment in the Porong region. Calling from political ecological perspective, it examines Porong as a space of power contestation to provide explanations of how the local people's interrelation with other people and their environment. Porong is not only a place for living, but also a living space and as the chapter shows it has been a space in which humans perform various ecological modifications resulting in the increase of power relations, especially between local people and outliers.

The chapter argues that "Porong" is more than just an administrative area of a district, it is rather a spatial concept of a region initiated and created by humans following the damming of the Brantas River, the largest river in east Java, in pre-Majapahit Java. Since that time, there have been major ecological projects in the region not only resulting in the alteration of physical environment but also shaping the culture of the people living within it. From the colonial to post-colonial era, the spatial alteration of the region has been frequently associated with a collusive relationship between the government apparatuses and corporations (e.g., sugar factories, large industries, mining companies) to facilitate them in performing economic activities in Porong. Such

a relationship has been marginalizing the local people and subordinating them to other people's interests who occupy and modify their environments. The marginalization of local people is also manifested in so-called "local knowledges" being shared and circulating in Porong as if they are the ones who never win in the battle of power over their land.

The chapter chronicles the formation of a stalled space of "Renomencil" where Lapindo eventually drilled the controversial Banjar Panji 1 well, which has been linked to the mudflow owing to the fact that the first eruption was detected just a few meters from it. Following Oliver-Smith and Hoffman, the mudflow can be categorized as an environmental hazard (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002). But since it erupts in densely inhabited region, the mudflow has generated a major disaster by evicting the local inhabitants, disrupting backbone transportation infrastructures of the province, and shaking the nation's politics and economy. The mudflow inherent risks and hazards have stimulated social and ecological crises and to a degree have triggered some efforts to maintain preexisting power relations within the local communities.

As the following chapters will discuss, the mudflow hazard has become a critical environmental discourse of "disaster" in relation to different political interests of different actors. The subsequent chapter attempts to show how the enlargement of the mud-affected area resulting from a combination of the unstoppable mudflow eruption and risky mitigatory actions performed. It is to address the first actor of the Lapindo case discussed in this study, i.e., the government.



Map 2 Map of Disaster Zone (Courtesy of Anton Novenanto & Imron Fauzi, 2014)

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## Chapter 3 | Risky Mitigation

The ecological crisis involves a *systematic violation of basic human rights*, a crisis of basic rights whose long-term effect in weakening society can scarcely be underestimated. For dangers are being produced by industry, externalized by economics, individualized by the legal system, legitimized by the natural sciences, and made to appear harmless by politics. (Beck 1996, 18, emphasis original)

### 3.1. Under the banner of protests

A few weeks ahead of the seventh-year anniversary of the mudflow eruption (on May 29, 2013), a group of victims built shacks on the top of the western embankment and overnighted there. It was part of their efforts demanding the remaining compensation from Lapindo. In addition to such efforts, they hanged three huge banners on the outer side of the embankment wall facing the Porong highway so that many people could read what is written on them (Fig. 3.1). The first banner (above) reads: “Why is the outside map victims have been fully compensated, while we, the outside map victims, have not been paid off after seven years!”<sup>24</sup> The second banner (below-left) reads: “This land has not been paid [and therefore] BPLS is not allowed to work in here!”<sup>25</sup> The third banner reads: “We call for the government to revise

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<sup>24</sup> “Kenapa di luar PAT [peta area terdampak] sudah dibayar sedangkan kami yang di PAT sudah 7 tahun belum dibayar!”

<sup>25</sup> “Tanah ini belum dibayar, BPLS dilarang bekerja di sini!”

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Presidential Regulation No. 14 (of 2007) [so that] the outside map victims shall be paid by the government, *too!*”<sup>26</sup>

Each of those banners raises different issues in relation to recent conditions of the victims. The first banner brings about the issue of different treatments between the outside map and inside map victims in regard to the mechanism of compensation payment (see 2.6 & 3.7). It also shows that, sadly, up to seven years of the mudflow eruption, Lapindo has not yet to recompense all the “inside map” victims. This makes the second banner seems understandable as the reason why victims prohibit BPLS performing mitigatory countermeasures on the uncompensated area. It is due to those victims are considering that they still own the land and for this very reason no party may perform any activities on the land without consent of the landowner. In the third banner, the victims offer the best solution to solve such problems: the government should take over Lapindo’s responsibility to recompense these victims.

One could easily see the structure of the statements on the banners in the following order: first banner tells about the root problem (i.e., Lapindo has not yet to pay off compensation of victims), the second contains the consequence if the problem has not been resolved (i.e., the victims prohibit BPLS to work mitigating the mudflow), and the third proposes a solution to resolve the problem (i.e., the government must take over Lapindo’s obligation to pay the remaining compensation). Above all, these banners are proving one fact: there is a fundamental problem inherent within the disaster politics. The unsettled

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<sup>26</sup> “Kami minta pemerintah merubah Perpres 14, korban lumpur yang di PAT juga harus dibayar oleh pemerintah!”

compensation of victims is perhaps the most publicly well known for the media have frequently heralded it. However, as the chapter will show, it is just among other complications generated by the disaster politics.



Fig. 3.1 Protest banners on the embankment wall (Photo courtesy of Lutfi Amiruddin, 2013)

The chapter is grounded mainly on a critical discourse analysis of mitigation policies regarding the mudflow hazard, with some additional ethnographic data from the fieldwork in Porong. It begins with a review analysis of preexisting structures underlying the government politics in dealing with the hazard by chronicling its responses and paradigmatic transition. Subsequently, focusing on the consequences of mitigatory actions, it demonstrates how the mudflow mitigation, like many other environmental-related projects, consists of unintended dangers and threats that may generate

more social and ecological crises apart from the mudflow itself. Throughout the chapter, I argue that instead of mitigating the mudflow's impacts the government has been one key actor to make the disaster even be more systematic.

### **3.2. Disaster, moral duty, and policy analysis**

Whereas the previous chapter explores a brief political ecology history of the Porong region as a highly contested landscape prior to the birth of a mudflow (on May 29, 2006), this chapter aims to focus more on the politicization of the region in the aftermath. It aims to unravel fundamental problems through critical examinations of the disaster politics of the government. Relying on a framework to consider disaster as an event/process, it is intended to explore how power is exercised in the course and aftermath of disaster mitigation policymaking.

The investigation of the role of the government dealing with disaster is based on an assumption that the government is supposed to be a political institution that is responsible for balancing social and ecological crises in the aftermath of a disaster (Zack 2009; Rozario 2007). It is the government's duty as a modern political institution to develop prevention systems and strategies for impending environmental hazards (both natural and technological) and to make sure that a disaster, once it had happened, will not grow larger and broader to suffer more people in the country (Dynes 2000; Huet 2012; Rozario 2007). Environmental hazards are frequently seen as negative, unwanted, destructive events that may interrupt national economy and many people

expected the active role of the government to deal with the abnormality that follows them as soon as possible (Faure 2007; Sugarman 2007; Zack 2009). Accordingly, some hazard-prone countries have been developing prevention systems and strategies to increase their resiliencies towards environmental hazards for such would not turn into disasters (J. W. Anderson 1968; McCabe 2002; Bankoff 2003) since the government has the authority to publicly define an event as a “disaster” or not (Rozario 2007; J. W. Anderson 1968; Button 2010). Statements from governmental officials have always been used as the main reference for developing general knowledge about a disaster (Button 2010; Sood, Stockdale, and Rogers 1987) and therefore the government plays a key role in the public discourse about disaster.

I shall argue that the relation between humans and their environment in the wake of a disaster is not just one-way (how the hazardous environment has the power to affect humans), but two-way (how both parties interrelate with one another). It is not only about how human agents adapt to the hazard, but also about how they have been trying hard to modify it. The purpose has been to reduce risks and potential threats, or, at least, so that the repercussions could be suppressed. However, every environmental-related project contains “risks” that may trigger and raise more social and ecological problems (Beck 1992; 1996; Bryant 1998). Accordingly, disaster politics has eventually contributed to the escalation of the disaster and to a degree environmental hazards are anthropogenic.

Some scholars have already analyzed the role of the government in the Lapindo case. Muhtada, for instance, argued that the disaster politics could

not solve the social problems due to its partiality and the economic, social, and ethical complexities of the disaster itself (Muhtada 2008). Fitrianto took a different departure arguing that most complications of the Lapindo case stem from a wide gap between the mitigation policy and the actual need of the victims (Fitrianto 2011). As a way out from these problems, he proposed the idea that if the government should have involved community members, especially disaster victims, in the policymaking the gap would not be too extreme. A recent study by Putro & Yonekura demonstrates that the increasing human insecurities among victims as a result of the disaster politics made by the government (Putro and Yonekura 2014). Nonetheless, instead of giving a clear explanation of the core problem of the disaster politics, these prior studies raise more questions: Why is there partiality in the disaster politics? Why is there a gap between the mitigation policy and the actual needs of the victims? What has the government done to increase the society's vulnerability instead of its resilience? In this chapter, I shall condense those questions to dive into a more substantive concern: in which ways the Indonesian government has been allowing such complications to persist and endure? And, why the government chose to do so?

The chapter focuses mainly on policies produced by the government in dealing with the problems of the mudflow and the side effects of such policies on the society and ecology in Porong and beyond by considering a classic issue in policy studies: the alienation of citizens in the policymaking process and the expanding coverage of policy from time to time (cf. Shore and Wright 1997). For policy is mainly outlined in language, it parallels Foucault's concept

of “discourse” Foucault designates discourse in three different levels for it can be: any articulated statements; a group of statements, which are interconnected in a same web of meaning and therefore it may have conflicted with other grouped statements; and, a “regulated practice” to articulate particular statements in particular fields (Foucault 1972, 80). An understanding of discourse as regulated practice has been the most distinctive in Foucauldian theory of discourse for it brings the concept of power into an analysis of discourse. Indeed, Foucault considers discourse less as oral communication than as knowledge transmitting power and producing power relations (Foucault 1978, 101).

Following this perspective, I shall focus on a discourse analysis of policy by addressing it simultaneously as: a locus of struggles, a vehicle of power, and a political practice. As a locus of struggles, policy is seen as a group of statements that stems from a series of discursive practices of selecting, adjusting or discounting particular knowledge in the policymaking and implementation. In regard to policy as a vehicle of power, one can examine it in the context of its function in creating (and maintaining) one’s interest and identity as well as erasing (and ignoring) others’. An examination of policy’s power effects is needed for it determines rules and regulations applied to one population yet inapplicable to other populations. Lastly, policy is also a political practice for it is needed as a legal basis to concrete ideas into realities and without it the government has no authority to perform a development project, including the one that will be discussed in the chapter, i.e., disaster mitigation.

### **3.3. A political disaster**

The mudflow that is happening in Porong, says Jim Schiller, is an “unnatural disaster” because it has released “a plethora of political issues” in Indonesia (Schiller 2008). And since many people have frequently linked the mudflow to Lapindo’s nonprocedural drilling of a natural gas exploration well, an analysis of the mudflow politics should begin with a description of the political economy contexts of oil and natural gas industries in Indonesia and especially in east Java.

#### **Oil and natural gas industry**

A chain of political events in Indonesia (the 1997 economic crisis, the resignation of Soeharto in May 1998, and the beginning of the Reformasi era) has brought major changes in many sectors in the country, including the oil and natural gas industries. The Indonesian government was in a very difficult state to revise some key regulations in accordance with guidelines provided by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008, 60). One essential adjustment was the privatization of several state-owned companies, including Pertamina (*Perusahaan Pertambangan Minyak dan Gas Bumi Negara*, State-Owned Oil and Natural Gas Mining Company).

The former law of Oil and Natural Gas Industry (UU No. 8 of 1971) indicated the establishment of Pertamina to control every oil and natural gas mining activity in the country. It marked the beginning of the domination of Pertamina and therefore the government in the sector for almost fifty years. Over those years, private mining companies had to have a working contract

(*kontrak karya*) with Pertamina as government's representation before they could conduct their business in Indonesia. In 2001, the domination ended with the issuance of a new law of Oil and Natural Gas (UU No. 22 of 2001), of which also signs the beginning of a free market competition of oil and natural gas mining industries in Indonesia. Pertamina is, then, posited as just another company and has to compete with other domestic and international private companies since the government established a new body, BP Migas (*Badan Pelaksana Minyak dan Gas Bumi*, Control Board of Oil and Gas Mining Activities), to authorize mining permits of those companies without having a contract with Pertamina. Recently, in November 2012, the Constitutional Court released a verdict of BP Migas to be unconstitutional with the country's constitution (UUD 1945) and therefore it should be dissolved. In response to the decision, BP Migas is replaced by a new agency, SKK Migas (Special Task Force for Upstream Oil and Natural Gas Activities).

East Java is the location of, at least, three large exploration blocks of oil and natural gas: Cepu Block (of which part is also located in the Central Java province), Brantas Block, and Kangean Block. These blocks are operated by several domestic and foreign oil and mining companies, respectively. By 2007, there were at least twenty-five mining companies operating in the province, including Lapindo Brantas in Brantas Block, Exxon Mobile, and Pertamina in Cepu Block, and Energi Mega Persada and Petronas in Kangean Block (Ahmady et al. 2010, 170–171). Among other exploration and exploitation wells in those blocks, the Banjar Panji 1 well in Brantas Block operated by Lapindo Brantas has been the most controversial on the ground that the first mudflow

eruption was detected adjacent to it. This fact has opened a possibility of public opinion of the drilling triggering mudflow.

### **Lapindo's political economy<sup>27</sup>**

Lapindo Brantas (or Lapindo) is one subsidiary of a family conglomerate in Indonesia, the Bakrie family. Aburizal Bakrie, the leading figure of the family, has successfully managed to save the family business from the 1997 financial crisis by his active role in the Golkar Party (*Partai Golkar*). It was the ruling party of the New Order and therefore the family has benefited from receiving financial subsidizes from the government (Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008, 61).

To many people, the government has been seen to protect and shield Lapindo as the culprit of the mudflow incident owing to the complex relationship between Aburizal and the former president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. Back in the 2004 election, Yudhoyono's political party, the Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat*), was still a new and small party with less than ten percent of the seats in parliament. To win the 2004 presidential election, Yudhoyono had to run with Jusuf Kalla from Golkar as his vice president's candidate. At the time, the Golkar Party was the winner of the 2004 election and the majority party in the parliament, with 128 of 550 seats. In regard to such achievements, it was the dominating party in national politics at the time. Even though Jusuf Kalla was a cadre of the Golkar party, his running with Yudhoyono was first seen not as an official representative of the party.

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<sup>27</sup> The section only provides a brief description of the political economy of Lapindo Brantas in Indonesia's national politics. I will elaborate this issue in 4.3.

The party was promoting another ex-military general Wiranto as presidential candidate in the 2004 election. He run with Salahuddin Wahid, one leading figure of NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama*, the biggest Islamic organization in Indonesia) and the brother of former president Abdurrahman Wahid (publicly known as “Gus Dur”), as the vice-presidential candidate. The couple lost in the first round of the election (on July 5, 2004) and thenceforth the party’s support was given entirely to Jusuf Kalla.<sup>28</sup> In the second round of the election (on September 20, 2004), the couple Yudhoyono-Kalla defeated their only competitor from PDI-P (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle): Megawati Soekarnoputri, former president and the daughter of Indonesia’s proclinator and first president Sukarno, and Hasyim Muzadi, who was at the time the chairperson of NU.

With the support from the coalition of many political parties, especially from the Golkar Party, Yudhoyono won the presidential election in 2004 and in return he appointed some cadres of the party to be ministers in the cabinet and this was how Aburizal could become a minister. In the cabinet formed in October 2004, Yudhoyono designated Aburizal as the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs. In late 2005, Aburizal was redesignated as the Coordinating Minister of Public’s Welfare (*Menteri Koordinator Kesejahteraan Rakyat*), of which position lasted until 2009. Therefore, at the time of the first mud eruption (on May 29, 2006), Aburizal was acting as an active minister in the cabinet. In his second term (2009-2014), Yudhoyono did not reappoint Aburizal as one of

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<sup>28</sup> Following the winning of the presidential election, the Golkar Party appointed Jusuf Kalla to be its chairperson (2004-2009). In the 2009 presidential election, Jusuf Kalla run for president with Wiranto as vice-president candidate from the Golkar Party. Unfortunately, the couple got the fewest votes, with less than thirteen percent of the total votes.

the ministers in the cabinet. It was due to Aburizal was elected as the chairperson of Golkar Party in October 2009.

It seems that Aburizal's contribution to Yudhoyono's presidencies was not merely just political (e.g., mobilizing members and voters of the Golkar Party) but also economical (e.g., funding the president's campaigns) (Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008, 55). If this is true, the government was in a serious conflict of interests regarding its disaster politics in Porong. Needless to say that Aburizal has a strong motive to prevent his company and family suffering from collateral impacts of the mudflow by pushing the government to declare the incident as a natural disaster and putting the blame on a major earthquake (on May 27, 2006). This definition implies that the government has to take over responsibilities rather than Lapindo (Batubara 2013). However, the Lapindo case has tarnished the image of the government as well as the Bakries (Kriyantono 2012).

### **3.4. Governmental responses**

#### ***Timnas (National Team)***

In the beginning of the mud eruption, the local government of Sidoarjo, with the help of the provincial government of East Java, established a voluntary emergency task force, which only lasted for some weeks as the eruption become unstoppable. As the mudflow was approaching and threatening the toll road, former regent of Sidoarjo Win Hendrarso called for help from the central government to take over the situation (Saputra 2006b). It was on the day after the road was declared to be totally closed due to the mudflow (on

June 14, 2006), the central government began to involve in handling the incident, marked by the establishment of a special team for investigating the incident (Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008, 65). The team was established and supervised by the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources designating Rudi Rubiandini from the Department of Petroleum Engineering at the Institute of Technology, Bandung (ITB) led the investigation. In early September 2006, the team declared that the eruption was due to Lapindo's negligence of not installing a safety casing in the course of drilling the Banjar Panji 1 well (Tim Walhi 2008, 2). In other words, representing the viewpoint of the government the team declared that the eruption was due to a technological accident.

Following the disclosure of the result, on September 8, 2006 president Yudhoyono issued a presidential decree (No. 13 of 2006) concerning the formation of *Tim Nasional Penanggulangan Lumpur Panas di Sidoarjo* (National Mitigation Team of the Mudflow in Sidoarjo; publicly known as and henceforth, "Timnas"). The decree invited criticism, especially from victims, since presidential decree (*keputusan presiden, Keppres*) is not listed in Indonesian legislation structure.<sup>29</sup> A presidential decree is issued only to address special circumstances that require immediate governmental responses yet a proper regulating law does not exist. Therefore, according to many, a presidential decree would not be legit enough to address and resolve the problems of the

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<sup>29</sup> The structure of Indonesian law system is (from higher to lower levels): the 1945 Constitution (*UUD 1945*), laws/acts (*undang-undang, UU*), government regulations in lieu of law/act (*peraturan pemerintah pengganti undang-undang, Perppu*), (central) government regulations (*peraturan pemerintah, PP*), presidential regulations (*peraturan presiden, Perpres*), provincial regulations (*peraturan provinsi, Perda Provinsi*) and municipal/regency regulations (*peraturan kabupaten/kota, Perda Kabupaten/Kota*).

mudflow. All in all the decree was the first mitigation policy issued by the Central Government in dealing with the mudflow hazard.

The decree was constructed with regard to the conclusion of the investigation team, that the eruption was an industrial accident (Lapindo's negligent and reckless drilling). This can be detected by looking at the decree's underlying regulations, such as, Oil and Natural Gas Act (No. 22 of 2001), Government Regulation concerning the Managing and Controlling Safety in Mining Sector (No. 19 of 1973), Government Regulation concerning the Safety in Oil and Natural Gas Refining and Processing (No. 11 of 1979) and Government Regulation concerning the Upstream Oil and Natural Gas Activity (No. 34 of 2005). By seeing such a composition, it seems to me that Timnas was not established and working under an agenda of disaster management but rather within a context of handling a "mining industry accident." It is also confirmed by the fact that the team was working under the supervision of the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources in carrying out three main tasks: closing the eruption, supervising surface management of the mudflow and handling the social problems.

In the decree, the president designated some governmental officials, mostly from the national level, as Timnas's members. The list however only mentioned the positions without individual names. It seems to me, it was meant to ease the formation of the team. The organization of Timnas consisted of two main parts: steering team (*tim pengarah*) and executive team (*tim pelaksana*). Acting as the chair of the former team was the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources and the members were the Minister of Public Work, the

Minister of Marine and Fisheries, the State Minister of Environment, the Governor of East Java, the Commander of East Java Regional Military Command (*Pangdam Brawijaya*), and the Chief of East Java Police Department (*Kapolda*). Appointed as the head of the executive team was the Head of Research and Development Body at the Ministry of Public Work and the members were the General Director of Oil and Natural Gas at the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, the Deputy Head of the Control Board of Oil and Gas Mining Activities, the General Director of Highways at the Ministry of Public Work, the Deputy Minister of Environment, the Head of Research Body for Marine and Fisheries at the Ministry of Marine and Fisheries, the Commander of Combat Units at the East Java Military Command, the Regent of Sidoarjo and, last but not least, the General Manager of Lapindo Brantas.

The fact that Lapindo's general manager as a member of Timnas raises an issue of Timnas's independency as a governmental agency conducting the mudflow mitigation (Tim Walhi 2008; Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008). It is also mentioned that the formation of Timnas would not replace the foregoing mitigation that had been performed by Lapindo (art. 5). It also indicated the obligation of Lapindo to cover all expenditures (administrative costs and technical actions) of Timnas (art. 6) which made the dependency of the Timnas on Lapindo stronger. Concluding from these facts, Timnas thus the government were never in power of the disaster politics whereas Lapindo had a full authority by controlling the flow of funds to perform the countermeasures. This is a fundamental issue, especially in terminating the eruption and mudflow surface management, which will be discussed later on.

The decree mentioned the Timnas would only be working for six months (art. 7). It seems that the government (and everyone else) were expecting the eruption could be terminated immediately but as time went by the eruption had become even more massive and uncontrollable. On March 8, 2007, another presidential decree (No. 5 of 2007) was issued. It concerned with the prolonging tenure of Timnas for another month before a new body replaced it. Although Timnas only worked for seven months, it has placed core foundations for the disaster politics of the mudflow that remains until now.

## **BPLS**

Timnas ended after the issuance of a presidential regulation (No. 14 of 2007) concerning the formation of *Badan Penanggulangan Lumpur Sidoarjo* (Sidoarjo Mudflow Mitigation Agency; henceforth, “BPLS”) on April 8. To date BPLS is the only governmental agency that is responsible for the mitigation of the mudflow hazard. It is also mentioned that the executive body of BPLS obliges to send its report to the president (art. 1 par. 3), yet the president is not directly responsible for the body’s actions but the steering committee instead (art. 3 par. 1).

Built as an interdepartmental body, BPLS shows the complexity in the policymaking and disaster politics (cf. Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008, 65–66). BPLS works as a governmental body at the national level and therefore in conducting its actions it sometimes ignores the existence of local governmental organizations, both at the provincial and regency levels (Muhtada 2008; Fitrianto 2011). Above all, the establishment of BPLS has

posited the mudflow in Porong, Sidoarjo to be special in comparison with other environmental disasters in the country. It is important to note that at the time the regulation was issued the Disaster Mitigation Act (No. 4 of 2007) had not yet been signed. Two weeks after the regulation issued the parliament approved the act. This fact explains why BPLS has been working and operating separately from the newly formed mitigation agencies, such as, *Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana* (National Disaster Mitigation Agency; “BNPB”) at the national level and *Badan Penanggulangan Bencana Daerah* (Regional Disaster Mitigation Agency; “BPBD”) at the provincial level, in regards to the act.

The formation of BPLS has marked out three major points of the mudflow disaster politics, which can be seen by looking at the content of the regulation thoroughly. First and foremost, it indicates the sharing of responsibility between the government and Lapindo about “who should perform and finance what” in dealing with physical and social repercussions of the mudflow. A second point, it is the beginning of the official “victimization” because it specifies who is victim and who is not. Finally, the regulation has become a legal basis for the compensation of disaster victims and the mechanism applied to recompense them, in spite of it contravenes with other preexisting regulations (something that I will discuss in 3.7).

Generally speaking, there is no difference between the tasks of BPLS and Timnas: closing the eruption, managing the mudflow surface management and handling the social problems (art. 1 par. 2). However, the replacement of Timnas by BPLS was not only marking the substitution of the mudflow

mitigation agency but also denoting the paradigm shift of the disaster politics. The Oil and Natural Gas Act (No. 22 of 2001) was still included as one legal basis, yet the other underlying policies were replaced with mining-unrelated regulations, such as Spatial Management Act (No. 24 of 1992), Environmental Management Act (No. 23 of 1997), and Decentralization/Local Governance Act (No. 8 of 2005). By looking at the substituting of these underlying policies, the mitigation paradigm of BPLS is not grounded on “mining industrial accident” but rather “spatial management,” despite BPLS’s task is similar to Timnas’s. The shifting logic is also confirmed by looking at the organizing of BPLS. Similar to Timnas, BPLS is divided into two main parts: steering committee (*dewan pengarah*) and executive body (*badan pelaksana*), however acting as the chair of the steering committee is the Minister of Public Work and as the deputy chair is the Minister of Social Affairs. The Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, who had led the steering team of Timnas, sits as a regular member of this new committee, which suggests that there has been a transfer of responsibility from the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources to the Ministry of Public Work concerning the mudflow mitigation. This transfer coheres with the shifting paradigm from “mining industry accident,” which is the responsibility of the former, to “spatial management,” which is the main concern of the latter.

The organization of BPLS steering committee is made to be fatter than Timnas’s. The president appointed more members to the committee (e.g., the Minister of Finance, the Minister for Internal Affairs, the Minister of Transportation, the State Minister of National Development Planning, the Head

of National Land Agency and the Regent of Sidoarjo) in addition to the previously designated members of Timnas (e.g., the Minister of Marine and Fisheries, the State Minister of Environment, the Governor of East Java, the Commander of East Java Regional Military Command and the Chief of East Java Police Department). So, there are now fourteen members of BPLS steering committee, whereas Timnas steering team consisted of only seven members. Again, no individual name is mentioned, they are all referring to particular positions in governmental bodies. But, Lapindo's representative is no more. The composition of the steering team of BPLS marks the extension and therefore the complexity of the disaster politics.

According to the regulation, to perform the mitigation BPLS relies on an executive body, which is similar to Timnas but more concrete in the case of its members' designation. Apart from head, deputy head, and secretary, there are also three divisions in the body (operational, social and infrastructure divisions) (art. 5). The designation of executive body of BPLS is in evidence with the issuance of a supplementary presidential decree (No. 31/M of 2007), issued on the same day of the BPLS regulation. It mentions individual names to be designated as the body's members: Sunarso (Head), Hardi Prasetyo (Deputy Head), Adi Sarwoko (Secretary), Mochamad Soffian Hadi Djojopranoto (Deputy of Operational), Sutjahjono Soejitno (Deputy of Social) and Karyadi (Deputy of Infrastructure). According to a study, the appointment of Sunarso as the Head of BPLS's executive body has raised some critics not only because he is a retired military general but also at the time he was Aburizal's expert staff at the office of Coordinating Minister for Public's Welfare (Noeswantari 2009, 53–55).

Sunarso's designation in BPLS can be seen as both the intrusion of military leadership model and the intervention of Aburizal's, and therefore Lapindo's, interests in the disaster politics. Additionally, according to my own inquiries, the other members of BPLS's executive body are mainly government officials. Hardi Prasetyo was an expert staff at the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources; Adi Sarwoko was an expert staff for inter-departmental relation at the Ministry of Public's Works; Soffian Hadi was a senior member of the Indonesian Geologist Association; Sutjahjono Soetjipto was the assistant for economic and development at the Secretary of the Provincial Government of East Java; and, Karyadi was the Director of the Eastern Indonesia Region at the Ministry of Public's Works. The appointment of these particular persons signs the implanting of governmental bureaucratic culture in BPLS to perform the mudflow mitigation.

Another critical issue of the regulation concerns with sharing responsibility between the government and Lapindo in implementing and financing the mitigation. The regulation compels Lapindo to be responsible for financing the eruption termination (art. 9c), building mud embankment and spilling the mudflow through the Porong River/Canal (art. 15 par. 5). It also indicates Lapindo to be responsible in handling social problems by purchasing the inundated land and buildings "inside" the impacted area map (dated on March 22, 2007) (art. 15 par. 1). In addition to such a mechanism, Lapindo should pay the compensation in two periods: 20 percent down payment and the remaining 80 percent at once within two years after the first payment due (art. 15 par. 2). Furthermore, it specifies the obligation of the central government to handle

future social problems “outside” the aforementioned map (art. 15 par. 3). The division of responsibilities marks differences in the treatment of disaster victims receiving compensation and generates the emergence of new social groups in Porong (the “inside map” and “outside map” victims, see 2.6). In addition to the victimization and compensation of victims, the regulation defines the government’s responsibility to allocate the state budget (APBN) to fund secretarial expenditures of BPLS (art. 14 par. 1), remunerations of the members of the executive body of BPLS (art. 14 par. 2), and the relocation of abandoned public infrastructures (art. 15 par. 6). In regard to the remuneration, there is another presidential regulation (No. 13 of 2008), issued on February 26, 2008, which mentions the rights of remuneration and facility of the BPLS’s executive body members as equal to a public official of Echelon I, or one level below a minister position.

### **3.5. Amending policy, altering disaster politics**

For the mud eruption has become unstoppable and the mudflow has been gradually running into extensive areas leading to the enlargement of mud-affected region, the government has done several amendments to the initial presidential regulation of BPLS (No. 14 of 2007). By the time of writing of this study (in November 2014), the regulation has been revised five times through the issuance of presidential regulations on July 17, 2008 (No. 48 of 2008), on September 23, 2009 (No. 40 of 2009), on September 27, 2011 (No. 68 of 2011), on April 5, 2012 (No. 37 of 2012), and on May 8, 2013 (No. 33 of 2013) (see Table 4). The most noticeable issue in each amendment concerns with the

enlargement of disaster zone and therefore the augmentation of the “official” disaster victims. However, according to my critical readings to those amendments, I discovered other fundamental issues embedded in the amending regulations.

*Table 4 Mudflow Disaster Policies*

Date of issuance	Disaster Policy	Main substance(s)
September, 8, 2006	Presidential Decree No. 13 of 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The establishment of Timnas</li> <li>▪ The mitigatory tasks: closing the eruption, mudflow surface management, and social issues</li> <li>▪ “Mining industry accident” paradigm</li> </ul>
March 8, 2007	Presidential Decree No. 5 of 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The extension of Timnas’ tenure</li> </ul>
April 8, 2007	Presidential Regulation No. 14 of 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The establishment of BPLS</li> <li>▪ Sharing responsibility between Lapindo and the government to handle the mudflow social and physical impacts</li> <li>▪ Compensation of victims mechanism</li> <li>▪ “Impacted area” map (March 22, 2007)</li> <li>▪ “Spatial management” paradigm</li> </ul>
February 26, 2008	Presidential Regulation No. 13 of 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Remuneration and facility of the members of BPLS’s executive team</li> </ul>
July 17, 2008	Presidential Regulation No. 48 of 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The enlargement of disaster zone in three villages (Besuki, Pejarakan and Kedungcangkring)</li> <li>▪ “State treasury management” paradigm</li> </ul>
September 23, 2009	Presidential Regulation No. 40 of 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The enlargement of disaster zone</li> <li>▪ The exclusion of some Lapindo’s responsibilities in mudflow mitigation</li> <li>▪ The using of “uninhabitable area”, instead of “impacted area” map</li> </ul>
September 27, 2011	Presidential Regulation No. 68 of 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ BPLS to become a permanent governmental body</li> <li>▪ The establishment of an integrated team, surveying for more uninhabitable areas</li> </ul>
April 5, 2012	Presidential Regulation No. 37 of 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The enlargement of disaster zone in eight villages</li> </ul>
May 8, 2013	Presidential Regulation No. 33 of 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enlargement of disaster zone in one village</li> <li>▪ Compensation of religious facilities</li> </ul>

### **Shifting responsibilities**

One fundamental issue of the amending regulations has been the gradual reduction of Lapindo's responsibilities in performing the mitigation, which can be traced by looking at the eliminations of the company's name in several articles of the regulations. One example is the alteration of BPLS's Operational Division's duty "to control the mud eruption conducted by Lapindo Brantas" (Presidential Regulation No. 14 of 2007, art. 9[c]). In 2009, the phrase "conducted by Lapindo Brantas" is deleted (Presidential Regulation No. 40 of 2009), which corresponds to the government's decision of giving up to close the mudflow eruption in late-2008. Another example is the obliteration of a whole paragraph, which was originally written in the initial regulation as,

The cost to handle the mudflow, including in it the maintenance of the main embankments until the Porong River, is charged on Lapindo. (Presidential Regulation No. 14 of 2007, art. 15 par. 5)

An entirely new paragraph replacing it says:

The cost of mitigatory actions undertaken by the executive body of BPLS to protect the society and the infrastructure is charged to the state budget. (Presidential Regulation No. 40 of 2009, art. 15 par. 7)

As a result, along with the second revision issued (on September 23, 2009) Lapindo has no longer burdened to finance and perform mudflow mitigation for such responsibilities have been taken over by the government. The company is, however, still responsible for purchasing land and buildings of the "inside map" victims as a compensation mechanism of social problems.

### **Shifting paradigm**

Although the exclusion of Lapindo from the long-term mudflow mitigation has prompted critics from publics for there has been a circulating public opinion arguing that the government should not take over Lapindo's obligation to finance the mitigation and allocate the state's budget for such a purpose, a more fundamental problem with the amendments has been the alteration of the disaster politics paradigm. It can be traced by looking at the replacement of each amendment's legal bases. As discussed in previous section, the initial regulation (No. 14 of 2007) marks the first paradigm shift from "mining accident management" to "spatial management." The first amendment (Presidential Regulation No. 48 of 2008) marks a subsequent paradigm shift, this time it was to "State's treasury management." The shift can be traced by looking at the underlying regulations of the 2008 amendment, such as State Finance Act (No. 17 of 2003), State Treasury Act (No. 1 of 2004), State Budget Act of 2008 (No. 16 of 2008), and Government Regulation concerning the Management of State Property (No. 38 of 2008).

The using of the State Budget Acts has become more dominant in ensuing amendments because the amending regulations were meant to assure the compensation of the "outside map" victims with such sources. Concurrently, the status of the purchased land (either by Lapindo or by the government) automatically changes to the "property of the State" (*barang milik negara*) and BPLS is assigned to manage the land (Presidential Regulation No. 48 of 2008, art. 15c). Thus, following the issuance of the 2008 regulation the paradigm of

“State’s treasury management” has been central for BPLS to perform the current mudflow mitigation.

In line with the paradigm shift, some mitigation priorities are subject to alteration. At first, the mitigation priority performed by Timnas (from September 2006 to April 2007) was focusing on how to “keep the mud away from the people” (Karyadi, Soegiarto, and Harnanto 2012, 5). It was the guidance for the mitigation team to execute the closing of the eruption—which was considered to fail by the end of 2006—and the spilling of the mudflow to the Madura Strait through the Porong River/Canal. After failing to close the eruption, the mitigation priority was shifted to “keep the people away from mud” which was the main focus of the early BPLS, from April 2007 to September 2009. The key mitigatory action was how to move the local people from inhabiting dangerous area surrounding the main vent, which was also the beginning of the victimization and compensation of victims. During the aforementioned period, the president issued a regulation (No. 14 of 2007) concerning the determination of the mudflow disaster zone and two more regulations (No. 48 of 2008 and No. 40 of 2009) concerning the extension of that zone. These regulations set up the purchasing of land and buildings located in the zone and therefore legalized the eviction of the inhabitants. In reality, the strategy of purchasing land (and buildings) has brought about a serious financial issue for the government. Apart from allocating money to purchase the land, the government must allot the budget to finance the relocation of some vital public infrastructures, such as toll road, highway, and the railway. Accordingly, from 2008 to 2013, the government has distributed around USD 435.2 million for

recompensing the outside map victims and another USD 414.9 million for relocating the infrastructure and handling the mudflow (Putro and Yonekura 2014, 35). Subsequent to the issuance of the 2009 regulation, the mitigation priority was again shifted to “living in harmony with mud.” Between 2009 and 2012 there were no enlargement of disaster zone until the issuance of the 2012 regulation (April 2012), in which additional uninhabitable areas map were eventually mentioned in the regulation.

However, extending the disaster zone is not a current priority of the government. BPLS is focusing more on the development of the mudflow into a geologic tourism attraction, learning from other mudflows in central Java and in Azerbaijan. Since the mudflow disaster zone has become State’s treasury, BPLS holds a full authority to manage the area. In addition to the plan, BPLS has been intensively improving and developing a new island, officially named Sarinah. The island is generated from mud sedimentation at the estuary of the Porong Canal and BPLS is prospecting it to be a tourist attraction of Sidoarjo as a package with the artificial mud lake (Karyadi, Soegiarto, and Harnanto 2012, 155–163). Likewise, the government is funding several on-going researches to explore practical and economic utilities of the mud. Nonetheless, the idea of making the disaster zone as a tourist site has already existed beforehand, which came from private sectors and disaster victims themselves. In the 2009 fieldwork, for instance, I found some banners indicating such an idea (Fig. 3.2).



Fig. 3.2 Lapindo mudflow tourism (Photo courtesy of Anton Novenanto, 2009)

### **BPLS as a permanent body**

Subsequent to the issuance of the 2001 regulation, BPLS has become a permanent governmental agency within the structure of the Central Government. Also in the regulation, there is a supplementary paragraph concerning the tenure of BPLS's executive body, which was not mentioned in the initial 2007 regulation. In 2011, it is mentioned that the tenure is five years and can only be renewed for another period (Presidential Regulation No. 68 of 2011, art. 17 par 3). Additionally, the status of civil servants (PNS) in BPLS's executive body was changed from "conjunctive" (*diperbantukan*) (Presidential Regulation No. 14 of 2007, art. 16 par. 2) to "employed" (*dipekerjakan*) (Presidential Regulation No. 68 of 2011, art. 16 par 2). By "conjunctive" means that the civil servants are assigned for an external duty from their origin institution and the salary is coming from the new institution. By "employed" means that they are assigned for an external duty from their origin institution

but the salary is coming from the origin institution instead of coming from the new institution. By 2013, BPLS employs 249 people, including 17 active civil servants and 39 retired civil servants (Putro and Yonekura 2014, 35).

### **3.6. Handling the slippery mud**

In previous sections, I have pointed out some key responses and major changes within the mitigation policy of the mudflow. The section addresses three mitigatory actions performed by the government: the closing of the eruption, the mudflow surface management, and the handling of social problems. It is intended to describe the structures shaping the mitigation, the risks embedded within it, and the social and ecological consequences of such.

#### **Closing the eruption**

To close the eruption there were at least one technique that had been implemented: the relief wells.<sup>30</sup> To implement the technique, in July 2006, Lapindo brought a consultant from Houston, Texas, William Abel, to lead the drilling of two relief wells aiming to intercept the original borehole and pump in high-density drilling mud to plug the leak. In an interview conducted in September 2006, Abel was very sure that the technique would be a success, as he claimed, “There has never been one blowout in the history of drilling that was too tough to fix” (as quoted in Normile 2006). Sadly, he was wrong; the

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<sup>30</sup> Lapindo in-house geologists argued that before implementing the relief wells, the company had conducted two other methods: “snubbing unit” (re-entering to the Banjar Panji 1 well) and “sidetracking well” (drilling another hole to intersect with the Banjar Panji 1 well) (Istadi et al. 2009). But, according to Rubiandini, these two techniques should be understood as one package with the relief wells because prior to the implementation of the relief well one has to gain enough data by performing the snubbing unit and the sidetracking well. Without sufficient data from the techniques the relief wells could not be implemented (Rubiandini 2007).

method was failed. On December 13, 2006, Timnas eventually stopped it as for the land was shaking trembling the foundation rigs and this was valued as endangering the life of the crew.

According to head of Timnas's executive team Basuki Hadimuljono, the failure was due to a combination of massive flow of hot mud and instability of the ground in the surrounding of the site (Hadimuljono 2007, 63–65). On the contrary, Rudi Rubiandini, leader of the investigation team, disagrees with such a conclusion and raises a different opinion about the failure of the technique. In an interview in August 2009, he claims that Lapindo sabotaged the implementation of the relief wells and argues that the technique was failed not merely because technical difficulties in the field but also financial, administrative obstacles from the company's executives (Mudhoffir 2013, 26). At the time, Lapindo was financing alone all expenses of the initial mitigatory action, as regulated in the 2006 presidential decree, and therefore every action was depended on the decision of the company's executives (Mudhoffir 2013, 26–27). In this context, the technical team performing the relief wells had to wait for budget approval from Lapindo before it could perform any mitigatory measurement (cf. Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008, 64–65).

According to various talks with many activist-interlocutors, by the time the relief wells implemented the police was in the process of investigating and searching for evidence that could bring the case into a criminal trial. Obviously, the company did not want the incident developed into a criminal case owing to the legal and political consequences. If and when the court sentenced Lapindo to be "guilty," it would receive not only bad image but also questions for its

credibility as professional mining company.<sup>31</sup> Such consequences come with the company's obligation to pay for victims' compensation and ecological rehabilitation of the damage resulting from the mudflow as well as the revocation of the company's license. In regard to those consequences, the success to close the eruption with any technique, including the relief wells, would be very irritating for Lapindo. If the technique had successfully closed the eruption, it would be a solid proof that the mudflow is connected to Lapindo's drilling. Intriguingly, Lapindo has been frequently repeating the failure of the relief wells to close the eruption as one key statement to develop an argument to blame a major earthquake for triggering the mudflow and therefore no technology could shut it off (see 4.5).

The mudflow has attracted many people to propose "scientific" as well as "traditional" methods to close the eruption. In February 2007, a team from the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences of the Bandung Technological Institute (FMIPA, ITB) proposed a different method to minimize the eruption rate by dropping high-density concrete balls (HDCBs) into the main vent. The balls, twenty-to-forty centimeters in diameter and eighteen-to-eighty kilograms in weight, were roped together with steel cables. However, the effort was abandoned because Timnas concluded that the technique did not help much, even for slowing down the eruption (Hadimuljono 2007, 65–75). In addition to

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<sup>31</sup> On October 30, 2006, the police investigator submitted the file of Lapindo case to public prosecutors at the East Java High Court, *Pengadilan Tinggi Jawa Timur*. The file was rejected on November 16, 2006 because the prosecutor argued the police should find more evidence. On February 16, 2007, the case was resubmitted but it was rejected again on February 28, 2007. Since then there had been no progress about the criminal investigation to the case. Unexpectedly, on August 7, 2009, the new designated Chief of East Java Police Department issued an instruction letter of termination of investigation over Lapindo case and it is now iced and never logged as a criminal case in any court. (Kurniawan 2012, 127–131)

the aforementioned scientific methods, some traditional approaches were also implemented in order to close the mudflow. In September 2006, for instance, there has been a number of *orang pintar* (literally means “smart people,” but in this context it refers to “the paranormal”) signed up for a contest of closing the eruption with various, yet mystical methods. It was the late village head of Kedungbendo (one of many inundated villages) Hasan who held the contest and offered a reward in the form of an eighty-million-rupiah-worth house for anyone who could stop the eruption (Saputra 2006g). Thirty-five participants from many cities in Java and other islands in Indonesia (such as Kalimantan, Sulawesi, and Flores) partaken the contest and implemented numerous methods. The most common was throwing several objects, such as dead and/or live animals (goats, chickens, cows, geese, etc.) or other essences (rice, sand, salt, etc.), to the center of the eruption. According to BPLS’s guest book, until July 2007 there were at least 120 rituals have been performed in order to terminate the eruption (Prasetyo 2009), but none have succeeded and the mudflow continues.

In September 2008, the Indonesian government eventually declared to give up for closing the eruption and began to prioritize to handle the social problems (GSA 2008). Additionally, according to the same report, by the time there were detected at least fifty flammable gas eruption spots (DRE 2008). Moreover, according to Richard Davies, a professor of petroleum geology at the Durham University, closing the main vent, if it had been successful, would lead to another eruption elsewhere (personal communication, July 19, 2012). In 2011, a team of geologists predicts that the eruption will continue with the

same amount for the next three decades (Davies et al. 2011), which means the current state is not yet half from what may happen.

### **Flowing into the distance**

Apart from the closing of the eruption, the mudflow surface management has been one risky operation. The aim of such operation has been to keep the mud from overflowing to broader area that may lead to subsequent physical and social complications. Following the results of the cabinet meeting on September 27, 2006, Timnas began to supervise the implementation of two mitigatory actions for the surface management: the construction of embankments encircling the main eruption to hold the mudflow and the spilling of the mud to the Madura Strait through the Porong River/Canal (Hadimuljono 2007, 102). Currently, BPLS continues these actions by maintaining the embankments, which consist of three embedded problems: first, whose land should be sacrificed for building the dyke; second, who should technically do it; and third, from where the materials for the dyke can be supplied. In the following paragraphs, the last two problems will be addressed, while the first will be discussed afterwards.

Since the beginning, the embanking project has been focusing on the construction and maintenance of three artificial mud containers: the southern (or the main container); the middle container, accommodating the mudflow runoff from the main container; and the northern container, functioning as the last backup of the runoff (Karyadi, Soegiarto, and Harnanto 2012, 34–35, 44). Before Timnas, the party to be responsible for the embanking project was the

military force from the Regional Military Command of East Java (*Kodam Brawijaya*) with the money from Lapindo. Along with the establishment of Timnas in September 2006, Lapindo was still the party to be responsible for the project and this continued until 2009. Over the period, Lapindo had been very easy to distribute the project to its subcontractors. In an interview conducted in December 2009, the Public Relation Officer of BPLS, Zulkarnaen, admitted that BPLS did not have any information about financial status of the embankment project because it was kept in “Lapindo’s kitchen” (Batubara and Utomo 2012). As of the obligation of Lapindo to finance the disaster mitigation ended following the issuance of the 2009 regulation, there has been an increase in BPLS’s budget allocation for handling the mudflow, from USD 48.2 million (in 2009) to USD 78.2 million (in 2010) (see Putro and Yonekura 2014, 35). According to the data gathered by some *Posko*’s activists, there are three major state-owned companies (BUMN) in construction sector, such as PT Adhi Karya, PT Abhipraya Brantas, and PT Wijaya Karya, involve in the maintenance of the embankment. In addition to them, there were also middle-sized private companies, such as PT Wirabumi Amarta, PT Brantas Hilir, PT Hutama Karya, PT Anugerah, and PT Agung Subur, which had participated in the project.

While public’s attention is concentrating on the embanking project around the disaster zone, almost none problematizes the origin of all materials and the ecological impact from the project. The locals call the materials as *sirtu*, abbreviated from *pasir* (sand) and *batu* (stones); the technical term is macadam, the mixture of small- and middle-sized stones and sand to layer the road foundation. According to BPLS’s crews, the materials are obtained from

several spots of “borrow area” beyond the Sidoarjo regency, such as the Mojokerto and Pasuruan regencies (Karyadi, Soegiarto, and Harnanto 2012, 45–46). In the course of the 2012 fieldwork, I had a chance to visit one borrow area in Ngoro district, Mojokerto after tailing one macadam truck from the embankment. As I explored the area, I discovered one hill was almost flatted to the ground due to the excavation of the materials. According to a local I met, the location is a military ground but several military officers have been commercializing it by selling *sirtu* for building materials. The excavation has become increasingly massive following the mudflow hazard. Accordingly, the involvement of military officers in the embanking projects has been detected since the beginning of the project. The existence of the military is not only involved in constructing the first embankments but also guarding the borrow area in the Rembang district, Pasuruan with armed soldiers.

Over the time, the embankments have become a new threat for the people living around it for some parts of it frequently broke down. On September 15, 2006, for example, the southernmost dyke wall collapsed and the mud overflowed to the area of four villages (Mindi, Pejarakan, Kedungcangkring, and Besuki) (Hadimuljono 2007, 93–96). Among others, the incident resulted in the flooding of residential area of more than three hundred inhabitants in the Besuki village and more than twenty hectares of paddy fields in the village. The embankment was broken because it could no longer accommodate the mudflow. In the meantime, Lapindo could not build new embankment on the village because the villagers refused to leave their homes.

In the eye of the government (and Lapindo), villagers' resistance has been a major issue for the embanking project. For instance, in the first half of 2007, there was a resistance from Siring villagers, who rejected the embanking project on the western region. The resistance was triggered by the uncertainty of the victimization and compensation of these villagers. However, following the issuing of the 2007 regulation the resistance calmed down and the embankment project in that area could begin in August 2007 (Karyadi, Soegiarto, and Harnanto 2012, 56–57). Another resistance came from the villagers of Pejarakan and Kedungcangkring occurred between 2007 and 2008 when BPLS was planning to enlarge the mud spillway on both villages to facilitate the disposal of the mud through the Porong River/Canal. However subsequent to the issuing of the 2008 regulation indicating the purchasing of the area of three villages (Besuki, Kedungcangkring, and Pejarakan) the resistance gradually abated.

Currently, there is still one remaining resistance coming from villagers of Glagaharum, located on the east of the main eruption. These villagers have been refusing the embankment project on their land because Lapindo has not yet purchased it, even though it was included in the impacted area map of March 22, 2007. The refusal has led the mudflow to run unstoppable to the Ketapang River eastward which has brought about new problems for villagers who use the river for irrigation. Villagers living in the eastern of the main eruption grouped together in *Korban Lapindo Menggugat* (Lapindo's victims suing, or KLM) and facilitated by a Jakarta-based NGO Urban Poor Consortium (UPC) have frequently reminded BPLS about this issue. They argue

that, according to the presidential regulation, BPLS should only spill the mudflow to the Porong River/Canal and not to other rivers/canals, especially the Ketapang River. However, according to a representative of the group, BPLS is actually aware of the situation but since there is still an unresolved problem between the Glagaharum villagers and Lapindo, it cannot do much about it. This problem should be resolved before BPLS could begin the embankment project on that area (personal communication, Gugun Muhammad from KLM-UPC, June 6, 2013).

While there is a possibility of natural forces (such as heavy rain, land cracks and subsidence) breaking down the embankments, most threat came from technological or human factors. The worst embankment incident was perhaps the one happening in the evening of November 22, 2006. That night the northeastern embankment broke down as a result of a massive explosion of an underground main gas pipeline buried under the embankment. The 28-inch-pipe cracked and blew out because it could not tolerate the weight of the wall, the heat generated by the mud, and land subsidence. Fourteen technical staff of Timnas and military officers died following that accident. Additionally, the mud-affected area multiplied to the northern and northeastern, including the highly populated housings of PerumTAS and the main neighborhood of the Renokenongo village (see 2.6).

Another strategy of mudflow surface management has been to spill the mudflow to the Madura Strait through the Porong River/Canal with seven units of giant pumps Timnas brought from Jakarta and Batam to syphon 25,000 cubic meter of mud per day (Hadimuljono 2007, 102–106). Yet, the main

problem with the pumps was the fact that the mud was not liquid enough to be pumped out. To resolve the problem Timnas built a small canal functioned as mud spillway connecting the southernmost embankment directly to the river/canal. However, the mud viscosity is still very high and it is very difficult to spill the mud without mixing it first with water. In the meantime, the mud contains chemical essences corroding the pumps and pipes. To solve the problem, BPLS planned to enlarge the spillway but it had to postpone the plan after the resistance of Kedungcangkring and Pejarakan villagers (see above). Yet the social tension abated following the government's decision to purchase land and buildings in that area, the surface management was still depended financially on Lapindo. As a result, some administrative obstacles in the course of technical countermeasures occurred since BPLS had to wait for budget approval from Lapindo before it could execute the plan (Karyadi, Soegiarto, and Harnanto 2012, 106). The handover of Lapindo's responsibility financing the mudflow mitigation to BPLS following the issuance of the 2009 regulation makes BPLS more independent in performing the mud spilling.

As already discussed in 2.5, the mud spilling to the Madura Strait through the Porong River/Canal has led to the decrease of fisheries production in three districts (Porong, Tanggulangin, and Jabon) in Sidoarjo, from 7,338.5 tons (in 2007) to 5,467.2 tons (in 2008). Intriguingly, the government claims that the mud contains no toxic substance and therefore the spilling out of the mud through the river/canal, and other small rivers and canals nearby continues. Contradictory to this official statement, some independent studies discovered that the mud consists of heavy metal essences causing to rapid environmental

degradation surrounding the area (Putri and Yudhastuti 2013; Nusantara 2010; Juniawan, Rumhayati, and Ismuyanto 2012; Nurdiani, Firdaus, and Prihanto 2012; Pohl 2007). These substances have led to the surface and subsurface pollution in the disaster zone surrounding and along the Porong River/Canal until the Madura Strait. Thus, instead of mitigating the mudflow physical threats, the mudflow surface management has resulted in the growing of mud-affected area since more ecological risks have been detected in the area beyond the official disaster zone indicated in the presidential regulations. Satirically, in the course of the fieldwork, I frequently met many victims referred the “P” in BPLS as to *penanggulan* (meaning, “embanking”) instead of *penanggulangan* (meaning, “mitigation”) for the agency could only embank the mudflow without any success in mitigating (or stopping) the eruption.

### **Mapping the victims**

Cartography has been the main instrument of victimizing in the course of the mudflow hazard. Instead of just a figure, a map is an exercise of power owing to social and political consequences embedded in the knowledge it produces (Crampton 2001; Elden and Crampton 2007). The map has resulted in the changing of governance of a particular region and everything on it. In the Lapindo case, drawing a map means determining which region shall be included in and which shall be excluded in the disaster zone. Maps are, then, tools of victimization because when the region is included in the disaster zone its inhabitants will be attributed with a new identity and bonded to specific

rules and regulations concerning the compensation they would get as “disaster victims.”

Using maps as instruments of victimization is indeed very problematic for it only considers two variables—landlessness and homelessness—to calculate the compensation. Yet, according to a study, the compensation price for the mudflow victims came from a very spontaneously calculation of the former vice regent of Sidoarjo, Saiful Ilah, in September 2006 (Karib 2012). The context at the time was the government needed a piece of land in Jatirejo village for the embankment on the west of the main eruption. The embankment was aimed to hold the mud from overflowing to the railway and the Porong highway. Saiful, escorted by some military officers, invited twelve Jatirejo’s villagers to a meeting and persuaded them to sell their land and houses. He offered one million rupiah per meter square land and one-and-half million rupiah per meter square buildings. The land price offered was way beyond the “normal” price of land before the mudflow attacked, which was, according to my interview with some victims in the course of the fieldwork, ranging from 75,000 to 150,000 rupiah per meter square land. Additionally, Saiful argued that the price was above the basis amount of compensation of disaster victims in Indonesia. The villagers, who were under psychological and physical pressures, did not have other option but to accept it. The information about the price circulated rapidly among other victims who were at that time also demanding Lapindo to recompense their losses but there was no certainty about the mechanism and the price. Later on, the compensation mechanism and price offered by Saiful

has become legally binding for all mudflow victims following the issuance of the 2007 regulation.

Apart from that option there were actually two other alternatives: “recovery” and “collective relocation” (Batubara and Utomo 2010, 51–52). However, it is impossible to implement the former option because cleaning up the whole region that has been swept out by the mudflow is out of the question. On the contrary, according to many experts, collective relocation is the best choice for the victims (Rachmawati, Deguchi, and Yoshitake 2011; Fariza et al. 2011). Nevertheless, it was uneasy to implement communal relocation in immediately because finding a new land as large as the engulfed area, not to mention the quality, was very difficult to do in a very limited time. Lapindo at the same time was also offering to relocate the victims to *Kasiba*, referring to *Kawasan Sidoarjo Baru* (the New Sidoarjo area)—which turned out that the area was a modern housing of Kahuripan Nirvana Village (KNV)—, whereas most victims understood it as *kawasan siap bangun* (ready-built area) in rural areas.

The victims were grouped in accord with these two different options. There was the “cash and resettlement” option, which means the mechanism of Lapindo paying the victims with some cash and provide them new resettlements. On the other, there was the “cash and carry” option, which means Lapindo should only compensate victims with cash money and the decision to search for new dwellings was fully on the hand of the victims.<sup>32</sup> To resolve the conflict, in September 2006 there was a poll conducted within

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<sup>32</sup> These options are the root for the upcoming name of victim groups (see 2.6).

victims who were living in a refugee camp in Pasar Baru Porong (New Porong Market). It was not sure who initiated the poll since there are two versions about this issue. On the one hand, some informants said that Lapindo conducted the poll, but on the other hand there were other informants who claimed that the poll was an independent, conducted by some village leaders. Despite this conflicting information, what really matters for now is the fact that the poll's result determines the mechanism implemented for the compensation of victims. The result showed that the majority (77 percent) of victims voted the "cash and carry" option and based on that they demanded Timnas to urge Lapindo to pay for the submerged land and buildings (Batubara and Utomo 2010, 54).

The request for immediate implementation of the "cash and carry" option was getting more intense after the gas pipeline incident on November 22, 2006 owing to more people experienced the mudflow's direct impact. On November 27, 2006, there was a huge meeting between Timnas and the representatives from four villages (e.g., Siring, Jatirejo, Renokenongo, and Kedungbendo) facilitated by the Regent of Sidoarjo. The meeting resulted in three points: 1) the victims wanted the compensation with "cash and carry" mechanism, 2) the victims demanded a written statement from Lapindo to overcome socioeconomic problems resulted by the mudflow and 3) Lapindo should buy land and buildings from the victims with following prices: one million rupiah per meter square dry land (*tanah kering*), one-and-half million rupiah per meter square buildings, and 120,000 rupiah per meter square wet paddies (*sawah*).

Based on the meeting's results, the head of Timnas's executive team, Basuki Hadimuljono, issued a letter to Lapindo concerning these demands.

At the time, the villagers requested Lapindo to pay the compensation money all at once and, according to a calculation, it was predicted that Lapindo should have cash money up to 3.5 trillion rupiah to compensate all victims (Hadimuljono 2007, 178). Obviously, Lapindo was not in the position to accept the option and tried to convince some victims that collective resettling to KNV was the most reasonable option. However, the urge for implementing the "cash and carry" option kept on rolling and, eventually, on December 4, 2006, Lapindo issued a letter to Timnas declaring its willingness to accept cash and carry option based on the company's "social solicitude and moral responsibility" (*kepedulian sosial dan tanggung jawab moral*). The letter also mentions the payment in two periods: twenty percent as down payment and eighty percent of the remaining at once before two years from the first payment due. Aside from agreeing to the cash payment, Lapindo mentioned its intention to provide victims with new resettlement for those who still wanted the relocation option to KNV.

The letter came with an attachment of a map indicating the area that it would recompense. Although released by Lapindo, the map was signed by Basuki Hadimuljono, the head of Timnas executive team, marking the government's approval of the map. The map, however, excluded the area that was swept out following the November 22 incident. The inhabitants of this new engulfed area were also demanding Lapindo and/or the government to include their land and buildings in the map and to victimize them so that they were

eligible too for the compensation (see 2.6). In line with this demand, many victims criticized Lapindo's letter for it was not enough to legally bind the company with an obligation to compensate them. In their viewpoint, the government should issue a regulation obligating Lapindo to pay the compensation. Within such contexts, president Yudhoyono issued a presidential regulation (No. 14 of 2007) legalizing some points indicated in Lapindo's letter. Simultaneously, it announces the first official map of mudflow's impacted area within which the new engulfed area following the November 22 incident is included.

For the eruption has become unstoppable and the effort to close it stopped, the disaster zone has been gradually extending. A year after the issuance of the 2007 regulation, the government announced another map of supplementary mud-impacted area consisting of three new villages (Besuki, Pejarakan and Kedungcangkring) and indicated the purchasing of land and buildings on this area with the state budget (Presidential Regulation No. 48 of 2008, art. 15b, par. 1). In 2009, the government released another map and this time it was named the map of "uninhabitable area" (*area tak layak huni*) consisting of nine neighborhood associations (*rukun tetangga*) in three villages (Siring, Jatirejo, and Mindi) (Presidential Regulation No. 40 of 2009, art. 15b, par. 1a). In 2011, the government designated the purchasing of more land and buildings on the area with the state budget (Presidential Regulation No. 68 of 2011, art. 15b, par. 2) and did not announce another enlargement of disaster zone but rather the formation of an integrated team (*tim terpadu*) to estimate the growth of the uninhabitable area surrounding the mudflow (art. 15b par.

1b). Based on the findings of the team, in April 2012, another map of “uninhabitable area” consisting of eight villages (Besuki, Mindi, Pamotan, Gedang, Ketapang, Gempolsari, Kalitengah and Wunut) was released along with the issuance of the 2012 regulation. The government will purchase the land and buildings in the area (art. 15b par 6a) and in 2013 one more village, the Porong village, is added into the disaster zone.

Most of my victim-informants saw the issuance of presidential regulations as a good sign from the government in dealing with their situation because they function as legal bases to ensure the disaster victims will receive compensation for their losses and sufferings. However, as the following section will show, instead of resolving problems, the mitigation policy has created nothing but more complications since it reduces the social and ecological repercussions of the mudflow into economic term and mechanism.

### **3.7. Some covert, enduring issues**

In many public meetings and discussions concerning the Lapindo case, I noted one repetitive but intriguing question: “How is the current condition of the victims?” The answer for it tends to lead the discussion to whether the victims had been fully compensated or they had not. It seems to many people that subsequent to the full payment of the compensation victims’ problems will end too marking the simplification of the handling of social and ecological crises resulting from the mudflow. However, the unsettled compensation has become the most publicly known for the media frequently raise it to the surface. Combining critical readings into mudflow mitigation policies and

numerous talks with victim-informants, I discovered that the policies consist of some covert issues regarding other regulating laws in the country.

### **Different treatment**

One remaining problem, that I have already described both at the outset of the chapter and in the previous chapter, is the different treatments of the inside- and outside-map victims, which is the result of the shared responsibility between the government and Lapindo to recompense victims according to the 2007 regulation where Lapindo is responsible for the compensation of the inside map victims, while the government is liable for the outside map victims (art. 15 par. 1 & 3).

Theoretically, following Sugarman, in an environmental disaster situation the government is not only eligible to determine who shall (and who shall not) get compensation, but also to facilitate and assure disaster victims' compensation payment (Sugarman 2007, 13–14). Even more, it should guarantee that the compensation does not become another problem for the victims to rehabilitate from disaster (Posner 2003 in Faure 2007, 341–342) and as such it is bonded to an ethical responsibility to protect its citizens from a catastrophe instead of becoming the source (Zack 2009). However, this is not the case in the course of the Lapindo mudflow disaster. According to the data from BPLS, by the end of 2013, Lapindo has completed to pay nearly eighty percent of its total obligation of compensation. This actually contravenes the 2007 regulation, which ordered Lapindo to complete the compensation payment no later than two years after victims signed the contract. Knowing

this, the government maintains a very naïve idea arguing that it is not responsible for these victims because such is Lapindo's obligation. Apart from the fact that Lapindo has been postponing the compensation payment to the victims of the cash and carry group, the government has been blind to see what happens to the victims of the cash and resettlement group of which option was not mentioned in any regulations. As a result, the government has been ignoring the inside map victims' problems in getting compensation from Lapindo in spite of the fact that its policy has made unequal power relations between these victims and Lapindo in existence.

#### **From “compensation” to “transaction,” from “humans” to “files”**

Another fundamental issue relates to the issue of ownership within the compensation mechanism. For many victims, one paramount problem with the mitigation policy is the use of a specific legal term for getting compensation, that is, *jual beli* (literarily means, “buying and selling”). The term has replaced a previous term of *ganti rugi* (literary means, “compensation for the loss”) proposed by victims. First and foremost, whereas *jual beli* meant for all the victims—without seeing their possessions—, *ganti rugi* is eligible only for them whose names are mentioned in the certificate of land and building—even if, these people lived in another region.

Secondly, the idea of *ganti rugi* was likely to be understood as Lapindo indemnified victims without any change of the status of ownership, especially of land. This was meant that the victims would still have the possession of the land and buildings although the mud has already buried them. The idea of *jual-*

*beli*, on the contrary, refers to a pure business transaction: Lapindo purchases land and buildings from victims and therefore the victims will hand over their ownership of these assets to Lapindo. Following the idea, Lapindo is transacting victims' properties with money (and other material forms, such as house units in KNV) and the victims must transfer the ownership of the purchased assets to Lapindo in return. Thus, instead of being understood as a replacement for the losses, the mechanism regulated in the presidential regulation refers to a transfer of ownership or economic transaction (cf. Kirsch 2001). Although the medium is the same, i.e., money or other objects, the essence of transaction is never the same with compensation. Compensation is meant for punishment of the wrongdoers to rectify the victims of their actions (Fletcher 1981).

Thirdly, the use of ownership to determine the compensation value has reduced "humans" (i.e., victims) to "files" (i.e., certificates of land and buildings). Until now, neither the government nor Lapindo has known the exact number of the mudflow victims for the compensation is accounted in accordance to the submitted files without calculating how many people would receive it. As a result, compensation money only represent the exchange value of victims' land and buildings and therefore does not illustrate how many victims—individuals or households—because it is very possible for one victim to submit more than one file and for others to not have any legal proof of their possession.

One sociocultural problem following land transaction is the uprooting and depriving of people from their land that complies with something that Oliver-

Smith calls “disasters of development,” the process of destructing the society in the name of progress (Oliver-Smith 2010). The victimization has become another power exercises as it comes with the eviction of those victims from their homes and the expropriation of their land. In theory, there should be other multiple variables to be considered in compensating victims of displacement beyond just material factors (land and houses possessions) (Cernea 2003; Oliver-Smith 2010). For the mismanagement of rehabilitation of displaced community could cumulatively and structurally result in decapitalization of the society’s asset of production, impoverishment of the poor and might lead to the creation of “new poverty” (Cernea 2003, 39–40). This idea suggests that the compensation of victims of forced displacement should be enough not only to redeem their economic losses but also to facilitate them in recovering from the crises.

However, in the course and aftermath of forced displacement following the mudflow, the government only accounts material factors (e.g., land and building possessions) to determine the compensation of victims and therefore excludes other sociocultural aspects. Furthermore the mitigation policy has been generalizing the compensation rate without considering social, cultural, and economic values of each land and building. This means the exchange value of a productive land is the same with a barren one; a commercial building (such as a store or a warehouse) has similar price to a stalled house; a new house costs the same as an old house (regardless the diverse quality and historical value of each building). One intriguing fact with the compensation price is the calculation of productive wet paddies (*sawah basah*), which was

accounted 120,000 rupiah per square meter, far below the price of a house yard (i.e., one million rupiah per square meter). As discussed above, the former vice regent of Sidoarjo decided the price for buildings and land (house yards) of twelve Jatirejo villagers but did not mention any price for paddy fields. The price for paddies was suggested later, in the November 27 meeting. This fact suggests that key negotiators in bargaining land price for compensation were not farmers, or even if they were involved in the negotiation their role was very small.

Putting on a gender perspective, the problem of “who gets the compensation and how much” has become more problematic. In the Javanese culture, the ownership of land and buildings is more likely to be inherited to the male instead of the female descendants. One female informant from Siring village, for instance, expressed that her house was among four houses built on a plot of familial land (*tanah keluarga*). Sadly, the proof of ownership over the land was not listed in her name, but rather her eldest brother who did not even live in one of the houses. As of the first payment due, there was conflict amongst members of her family about how much each member of the family would get. Although there was an internal arrangement in the family before submitting the files to Lapindo, the informant said that most of the compensation money went to her brother whose name was listed on the file. Similar situation also happens in a marriage relationship, ownership of land and houses usually goes to the husbands instead of the wives. Another female informant from the Jatirejo village told a story of her father who did not come from Porong and the land was the legacy of her grandparents from her

mother's side. In the process of land titling, occurred before the mudflow, the land and the house built on it were listed under her father's name. As a consequence, all the compensation money went to her father, instead of her mother. Sadly, after the disbursement of the down payment, her father left her mother for another woman and brought most of the money. These examples are only some evidence for the marginalization of women victims as a combination of the Javanese culture and the reduction of compensation to land transaction.

### **Land acquisition**

The mode of victimization, which accounts "files" rather than "humans," has brought about new problems to the inside map victims who do not possess official certificates issued by National Land Body (BPN). Most victims only have extra-legal deeds of their land issued by a district head (*camat*), but Lapindo's subsidiary to handle the transaction, Minarak, insists to only purchase assets with certificate from BPN and disregard the existence of extra-legal deeds. Such a decision has been favoring mainly newcomers who bought their land or houses from previous owners or a housing estate. These newcomers usually have, at least, a certificate of "timesharing rights" (*hak guna bangunan*) of land from BPN. Therefore, these newcomers were easier to get compensation rather than the natives who only possessed extra-legal deeds of their land. As discussed above, to facilitate the transaction of victims without land certificates Minarak offered an option of "cash and resettlement" to KNV.

According to my discussions with some activist-interlocutors and law scholars in the course of the fieldwork, the decision to obligate Lapindo to purchase land from their owners indicated in the 2007 regulation contravenes the Agrarian Law (No. 5 of 1960) (cf. Kurniawan 2012). The act, which is hierarchically higher than the regulations, is the regulating law concerning land proprietary and use in Indonesia. According to it, private companies, such as Lapindo or Minarak, are not entitled to have a “proprietary rights” (*hak milik*) of land in the country and therefore every land transaction to a private company will automatically be “legally void and [the ownership of] the land falls to the State” (art. 26 par. 2). The issue was raised by the National Land Agency (BPN) on a letter (March 24, 2008) released to the Sidoarjo branch of the agency (BPN Sidoarjo). The letter elaborated some procedures of land transaction with Lapindo that should be followed. According to it, along with the transfer of ownership from previous landowners to Lapindo, the land status will eventually become “State’s property” (*tanah milik negara*). Subsequently, the government will grant the company a “timesharing right” (*hak guna bangunan*) on the land that it had already paid.

Most victim-informants I met did not have any knowledge about such legal consequences of their land transaction with Lapindo. Lapindo, on the other hand, has been aware of this issue since the beginning. In December 2006, there was a statement from Vice President of Energi Mega Persada (Lapindo’s parent company) Jusuf Martak who said that the transaction mechanism (for compensation of victims) would not only mark the transfer of proprietary rights of the land from landowners to the state and opened a possibility of Lapindo to

pursue reimbursement from the government over the money which the company has disbursed to victims (LAS et al. 2006). For such a possibility to occur will depend highly on whether the government will give Lapindo the timesharing rights or not. The scenario would be: if the government decides to grant Lapindo with the rights, then the money would not be reimbursed; but, if the government decides not to provide Lapindo any rights over the land (and thereby the government will self-manage the land), the company will get the reimbursement from the government.

Aside from the issue of victimization and land dispossession, the victims have to deal with the problem of finding new dwellings. To find a land lot, the victims have to deal and struggle with market mechanism. One main issue has been the rocketing price of land as a consequence of the increasing demand of land. In 2007, for instance, the land price in the surrounding of disaster zone had reached up to twenty times of the normal land price following the mudflow (Soegihprajoko 2008).<sup>33</sup> To most inside map victims with small assets of land and buildings, market mechanism was nothing but another disaster because they could not afford to purchase a new land or house with the twenty-percent down payment of the compensation they got from Lapindo. Therefore, the company's decision to pay the remaining compensation by installments has become another obstacle for these victims to find new dwellings. In the meantime, the government has been maintaining a naïve view seeing the relationship between victims and Lapindo as simply a relationship between

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<sup>33</sup> According to my own interview with a credit employee of a state-owned bank branch in Pasuruan in June 2012, the soaring land price has gradually dropped and began to meet with the normal inflation rates since many victims have already got new dwellings and the decreasing demand for new land.

sellers and buyers in a regular marketplace; what happens between the two parties will stay with them on the ground that there is no regulation that obligates the government to intervene in such a situation.

### **3.8. Mitigating or escalating disaster?**

In a modern world, the government has been the most expected political institution to deal with physical and social repercussions following environmental hazards (Zack 2009; Rozario 2007). The aim is to prevent the hazard from becoming a disaster. A common political response to environmental hazard is disaster reliefs, which can be defined as the acts to reduce the damage and restore the situation into a normal state. Unfortunately, in every environmental-related project (including disaster mitigation) there are inherent risks that may trigger more social and ecological crises in the society.

The government's decision to reduce the responsibility of Lapindo turned out to be problematic, and the same applies to the transition of the disaster politics paradigm from "mining accident management" to "spatial management" to "state treasury management." This implied a different framing the mudflow from anthropogenic to just another natural phenomenon. Thus, the governmental definition of the hazard became in fact crucial for the creation of the subsequent social disasters for the populations in broader surroundings and longer timeframes, or in other words: the political decision made the disaster a more systematic issue. This demonstrates that political decisions can mitigate social issues or escalate them.

In principle, there are three mitigatory tasks performed by the government. First, there was an attempt to terminate the mud eruption with the relief wells technique, which was failed or foiled. On the one hand, statements of government officials claim that the failure was due to some technical difficulties in the field (Hadimuljono 2007); on the other, independent experts claim that Lapindo foiled the effort owing to the fact that Lapindo was in control by financing alone all expenses for closing the eruption (Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008; Mudhoffir 2013).

Secondly, to keep the mudflow from overflowing to larger areas the government has built semi-permanent embankments around the eruption. In turn, the embanking project has resulted in the creation of a-800-hectare artificial mud lake and broader ecological degradations in some areas from which the materials for the embankment are taken. In addition to the embanking, the government has been spilling the mudflow to the Madura Strait through the Porong Canal/River. The spilling has led to nothing but more ecological threats along the canal/river for the mud contains heavy metals and other dangerous essences—something that the government has been denying all this time.

A third mitigation priority is how to handle social problems resulting from the hazard. By doing so, the government has been prioritizing the victimization and compensation of victims as if such will solve all the social and ecological problems of the mudflow. In many cases, instead of resolving the problems, the victimization and compensation mechanism has become another disaster

for victims. The victimization considers less social aspects than physical damages generated by the mudflow.

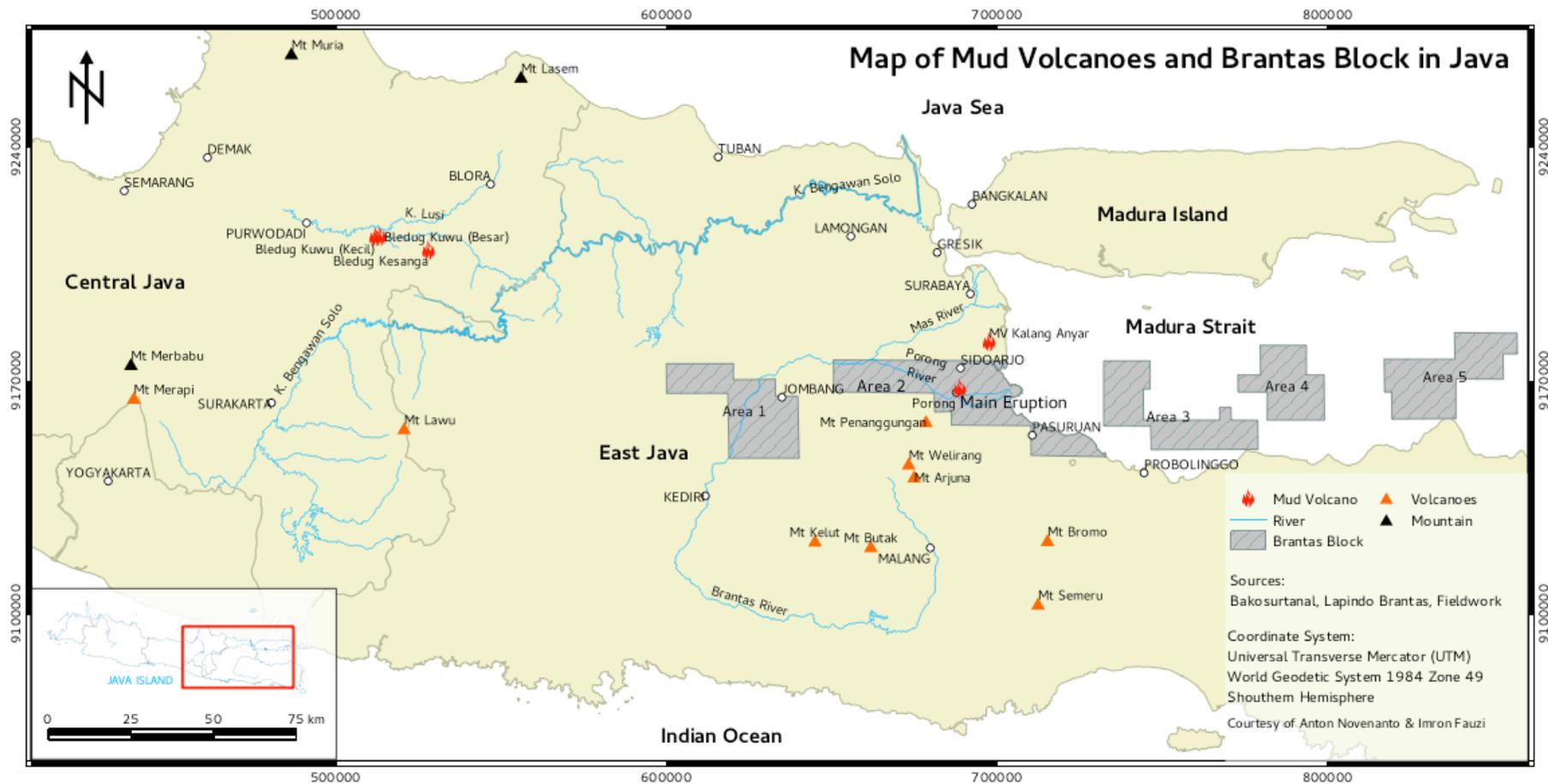
Up to recently, there has been no official data on the number of the mudflow victims. One main reason for this is the reduction of “humans” into “files” since the compensation is accounted from the ownerships of land and buildings. Additionally, there is a transition of meaning from “compensation for the loss” to “transfer of ownership.” According to Lapindo, there has been no compensation but rather transaction, to say that, the victims selling their assets to Lapindo as the buyers (see chapter 4). In other words, the victimization marked by the issuance of presidential regulations is nothing but legal bases for the eviction of the people living in the disaster zone because they do not have other option but to sell their assets and move to another places respectively. In turn, such a mechanism will bring about more complications in the future. As the chapter shows, despite the destructive impact of the mudflow to the social and ecological aspects in Porong, a more serious threat is coming from the disaster politics for it generates a systemic disaster to emerge and exist.

In a review article, British geographer Raymond Bryant summarizes three dimensions of political ecology analyses into a politicized environment (Bryant 1998). They are the “everyday,” “episodic,” and “systemic” dimensions. Bryant categorizes environmental disaster into the episodic model of politicized environment on the grounds that disasters materialize in a limited time and landscape (Bryant 1998, 84), but what happens in Porong is beyond this model within which *vulnerability* is the central concept. Instead of focusing on

vulnerability, the chapter considers *risks* to explain the emerging social complications in Porong nowadays. It is a key concept to understand systemic environmental problems as for the impacts are not limited in particular timeframe or landscape and a common response to such is public distrusts of official experts (Bryant 1998, 84). Environmental-related development projects have been proven to be potent in creating new social and ecological threats that may befall beyond particular time and space (Button 2010; Bryant and Bailey 1997; Oliver-Smith 2010). Such have been reoccurring in Porong and it seems to me that the government overlooks the inherent risks within the disaster politics by limiting its authority restricted only to what the mitigation policies indicate.

This has made some problems turning into a more systematic, complex state. The chapter aims to provoke comprehensive studies of the social and ecological networks of the mudflow hazard in broader landscape as well as longer timeframe. For the eruption continues to occur, it is very likely that the problems resulted from the mudflow will grow. The chapter focuses on the role of the government in dealing with the mudflow hazard in Porong, Sidoarjo and addresses how the disaster politics failed to meet the problems of the victims and resulted in unexpected social complications in practice. It does not aim the hazard that resulted from the mudflow per se, but rather investigates the growing social disaster that is produced by the disaster politics. It begins with the assumptions that the government has been a key actor to mitigate environmental disasters and deal with the social and ecological crises resulted from them bringing everything into the normal state. Combining the changing

political definition of the causes of the mudflow with the mitigation policies and the data from the fieldwork, I argue that instead of alleviating the physical and social crises of the affected people, the government has contributed in transforming a serious hazard into an ongoing social disaster rather than resolving the issue.



Map 3 Map of mud-volcanoes in Java and the Brantas Block

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## Chapter 4 | Contested Statements

### 4.1. So, what is a hero?

In mid-May 2012, I attended a small, unplanned reunion with some friends after attending a funeral of a friend who died in a plane accident. In the reunion, I heard many stories about misfortunes, accidents and, of course, disasters. One story is particularly significant to open this chapter. According to the storyteller, it is based on a real story about a high school classroom conversation concerning the Noah's Ark.

A pupil gave his view, "God sent a huge flood to humans as a punishment because they no longer respected Him. Before this all had happened, God told Noah to built a giant ark to save any things it could carry."

Another pupil entered the discussion, "Actually, Noah made the flooding." Suddenly the whole class turned their look at him.

"How come?" the teacher asked and everyone waited in silence for the answer.

The pupil gave his view. "Well, let's use our common sense. How did Noah get so much wood to build an ark of that size? The flood occurred because Noah had chopped down all the trees to build the ark. As of heavy rain occurred there were not enough trees to absorb the overflow of water. Noah is the one who should be blamed for causing the flooding."

The story has one crucial point that is relevant to this chapter, the power to contest a mainstream interpretation of a disaster, the flooding in the story of

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the Noah's Ark that has been derived for centuries. Instead of perceiving Noah as "the hero" for saving people and other animals from the flooding, the pupil framed him as "the bad guy" for chopping down the trees that had led to the flooding. This altered understanding of the Noah's Ark story is something that is very relevant to the main issue addressed in this chapter: the social construction of truth of an environmental catastrophe in discursive fields.

#### **4.2. Discourse and the social construction of reality**

It is because the first eruption was occurred adjacent to a natural gas exploration site, the Banjar Panji 1 well, it is easy for public to blame the company, Lapindo Brantas ("Lapindo") for waking the mudflow in Porong. The blame is a serious threat for Lapindo due to its economic, social, and political consequences. If it is true, Lapindo should bear all the costs to compensate the victims and insure the rehabilitation of social and ecological damages in Porong. Even more, the company could be put on trial for causing to such a catastrophe. Thus, the claim of the mudflow as an "anthropogenic disaster" is something that Lapindo has to deal with and this is the main subject of the chapter.

As mentioned in chapter 1, the present study investigates "discourse" beyond just a concept in linguistic, which consists of words/phrases/sentences that structure a sentence. It resonates Foucault's argument that discourse is related to practices and power (Foucault 1978, 101). Discourse is a series of practices of grouping statements around particular issues and raising them up in certain discursive fields. Thus, discourse determines the orchestration and

governance of social reality. To Foucault, power is not a result of certain political purposes gaining recognition from others, but rather exists through resistance to certain discourses and the production of counter-discourses (Foucault 1981). What is core in Foucault's theory of discourse is a question of the will to truth, the question aimed not onto the search for the truest statements but rather to break down political strategies behind truth claiming. Foucault is therefore not trying to dismantle political ideology for he argues that all kinds of "truth" are the outcome of different discourses in relation to epistemic practices (Foucault 2007).

This chapter explores the politics of truth performed by Lapindo in struggling with the claim of "anthropogenic disaster" and promoting a counter-claim of "natural disaster" concerning the mudflow in Porong in three discursive fields: science, the media and politics. The choosing of these fields is following John Hannigan's argument on how environmental issues are being socially constructed. Hannigan suggests the unraveling of social construction of environmental issues one should focus on three concerns: the claims, the claims-makers and the claims-making process (Hannigan 2006, 64–66). The chapter limits the claims to "anthropogenic disaster" and "natural disaster" claims, the claims-maker to Lapindo, and gives more portions on the discussion of the claims-making process in three different discursive fields: science, the media and politics.

According to Hannigan, the claims-making process can be elaborated into three stages: assembling, presenting and contesting claims (Hannigan 2006, 67–75). The key agents in the assembling claim stage are the scientists for they

perform some primary activities such as discovering, naming and determining the foundation “scientific” theories and evidence of the problem. Nonetheless, the field of science, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it, is the field where the “*specific* issue at stake is the monopoly of *scientific authority*” (Bourdieu 1975, 19, emphasis in original). Even more, Bruno Latour gives a very clear illustration of what is happening in science:

Scientific facts are like trains, they do not work off their rails. You can extend the rails and connect them but you cannot drive an engine through a field. (Latour 1983, 155)

Therefore, to have a success in winning a claim, scientists or, substantively, a group of scientists must provide solid evidence of which can only be obtained by performing an effective division of labor in conducting the research. Or else, they will only fall in ambiguity by delivering conflicting scientific evidence.

A second stage of the claims-making process is presenting claims. It takes place in the media for they have a significant role to gain moral supports from general public to particular claims. Indeed, the media are not just a means to share and receive information about some events. They are not about a window “to see” what happens out there in the disaster site, but also a framework “to understand” about such (Tuchman 1978). This situation is reminiscent of Rene Magritte’s *The Human Condition* discussed in 1.2. In presenting particular scientific claims, the media workers are required to connect them with popular events in the society and describe them in dramatic and perceptible descriptions through various rhetorical strategies in writing the news (Hannigan 2006, 70–72). However, media news is less just a plain representation of reality than a result of rigorous negotiations between

journalists and their sources and employers (Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1989; Gamson et al. 1992; Bourdieu 2005). The process of making news about particular issue is, indeed, getting more complicated when the issue is influential for the sustainability of the media as economic organizations (Gamson and Modigliani 1989; Scheufele 1999).

All in all, mass-mediated environmental issues have shown some clear tendencies (Hannigan 2006, 89–92). First and foremost, the media are framing environmental issues as “scientific” discourses. Secondly, the media tend to contextualize such discourses into human-interest discourses, such as to what extent humans contribute to and will be affected from them. In so doing, the media present dramatic, if not mystical, narratives. Thirdly, the media seek for long-term political and economic prospects from raising such narratives. It is not only about pursuing economic incomes but also about positioning credibility in the competition with the other media. Fourth, as such, the media situate environmental issues in a conflicting framing. Last but not least, media news have become a main reference for politicians to perform the final process of claims-making process, contesting claims in political arena. In contesting claims, politicians are invoking actions (and reactions) to gain political supports to concrete the claims into policies.

The chapter is mainly grounded on archival data, with some ethnographic data from the fieldwork will be presented to give contexts of the archiving. The first two sections will briefly describe the position of Lapindo in Indonesia and in the mudflow and the emergence of the “anthropogenic disaster” claim. The subsequent three sections will discuss the strategies of Lapindo in three

different fields: science, the media and political arena. I conclude that to some extent Lapindo has been enlivening and reviving the power competition over the mudflow in Porong.

### **4.3. Lapindo Brantas**

Lapindo is one subsidiary of the Bakrie & Brothers (henceforth, “the Bakries”). It was directed under the management of a subsidiary of the Bakries in the energy sector, i.e., Energi Mega Persada (EMP), before in 2008 it was fully transferred to another the Bakries’ Malaysian-based subsidiary in cement plant, Minarak Labuan Co (MLC).

### **The Bakries**

The Bakries is among giant family conglomerates in Indonesia. It was founded in February 10, 1942 by Achmad Bakrie for pepper and coffee trading (Pohan 2011, 9). In 1985, Achmad appointed his eldest son, Aburizal, to take the lead of the conglomerate starting from January 1, 1988 (Pohan 2011, 222). Achmad passed away on February 15 after having an intensive treatment because of illness at the age of seventy-one in Japan, just a month after the substitution. Aburizal’s siblings are two brothers, Nirwan and Indra, and one sister, Roosmania. By 2012, the Bakries is a holding company of more than fifty subsidiaries and delivering business in many sectors (ranging from metal industries to energy and mining to telecommunication to media enterprise to infrastructures and real estates), with a net income of 355 billion rupiah (c. USD 36 million) (Bakrie & Brothers 2012). With such a business, Aburizal alone ranked at thirty in the 2011 Indonesia’s 40 Richest according to *The Forbes*

magazine, with net worth of USD 890 million (Fan 2011). However, in the last few years Aburizal neither any member of The Bakries exists in the list.

### **The Brantas Block**

Lapindo has been operating in one active oil and natural gas exploration block in East Java, namely “the Brantas Block,” since 1996. The block is covering two main areas: offshore area (stretching from Mojokerto to Pasuruan) and onshore area (in the Madura Strait). It is the block in which the controversial Banjar Panji 1 well was located (Map 3).

According to a report of the Indonesian Audit Body (BPK), the Brantas Block was officially opened for an exploration and mining field starting from April 1990 with permission from the late president Soeharto (BPK 2007, 10). Huffco Brantas, a subsidiary of a Texas-based company, Huffco Inc., signed a thirty-year production-sharing contract (PSC) of the Brantas Block with the Indonesian state-owned oil and natural gas company, Pertamina. The contract is also known as the “Brantas PSC.” From that moment on, the composition of participating interests of the contract has changed for several times (BPK 2007, 12). The first appearance of Lapindo in the block was on April 11, 1996, when Huffco transferred the contract to a subsidiary of the Bakries in oil and natural gas mining, namely “Ladinda Petroindo.” It was established in 1990 by Rennie Latief, Indra Bakrie and Roosmania Kusmulyono (the last two names are the siblings of Aburizal Bakrie). It seems to me that the name “Lapindo” is the acronym of “Ladinda Petroindo,” while “Brantas” is taken from the name of the block where it operates. As of the transition, the name “Huffco Brantas”

was changed to “Lapindo Brantas” (BPK 2007, 17). By 1996, the shareholders of the Brantas PSC were half on the hand of Lapindo and another half on an Australian company, Novus Petroleum (BPK 2007, 20–21). Previously, in 1995 Novus bought participating interest of the Brantas PSC and established a new subsidiary, named “Novus Brantas.” Starting from June 2004, Novus Brantas operates in Indonesia as a subsidiary of Medco Energi International (BPK 2007, 12–13, 19–20). Medco Energi International is another private mining company established and owned by another Indonesian conglomerate, Arifin Panigoro. Medco Energi set up a new company, named “Medco Brantas,” to replace Novus Brantas. A few months later Medco Energi sold eighteen percent of its shares of the Brantas PSC to another Australian company, Santos (BPK 2007, 19). Thus, by the time when the mud began to flow (May 29, 2006) the composition of shareholders of the Brantas PSC was Lapindo Brantas (50 percent), Medco Brantas (32 percent), and Santos Brantas (18 percent) and acting as the operator of the block is Lapindo (BPK 2007, 11).

The term “the shareholders of Brantas PSC” is quite tricky for laypeople in the industry. Many of my informants, mostly victim-informants, were referring the term bluntly to “the owners or the shareholders of Lapindo,” whereas it should be understood as the shareholders of the block’s participating sharing contract (the Brantas PSC), in which Lapindo was only one of them. Lapindo’s shares were owned by Energi Mega Persada (EMP), the second largest Indonesian private oil and natural gas company holding the contract of eight blocks in the country (Equity Research Team 2006, 12) and recently expanding its business to other countries in Asia and Africa (The Jakarta Post 2013).

Following the wake of the mudflow in Porong in late-May 2006, EMP had attempted for several times selling Lapindo's shares to other companies. In September 2006, for instance, EMP tried to sell Lapindo to Lyte Ltd., another affiliated company of the Bakries (EMP 2006c). The plan was failed because the Indonesian Supervisory Body for Stock Market and Financial Institution (Bapepam-LK) rejected it. A month later, EMP almost succeeded in selling Lapindo to Freehold, a company based in British Virgin Island and unrelated to the Bakries (EMP 2006d). However, Freehold canceled the transaction because the deal had spread controversy in the society. Eddy Sugito from the Jakarta Stock Exchange (BEJ) stated: "The cancellation was a wise move because the liability scheme of the Lapindo mudflow disaster has not clear yet" (as quoted in JOE et al. 2006, my translation).

### **Minarak Labuan**

When president Yudhoyono issued a presidential regulation (No. 14 of 2007, see chapter 3), it was estimated that Lapindo must spend about 3.8 trillion rupiah (c. USD 421 million) to finance initial disaster mitigation and compensation of victims. This excluded other Lapindo's financial obligations in performing initial mitigatory reliefs, such as terminating the eruption and constructing embankments. That number was way much greater than Lapindo's total assets, which were estimated to be no more than USD 90 million (Equity Research Team 2006, 22, 28) and therefore a huge cash injection from other party(-ies) was needed in immediate. To meet these sudden needs, especially in financing urgent countermeasures for initial

impacts of the mudflow, EMP had been receiving loans up to USD 30 million from another subsidiary of the Bakries, Minarak Labuan Co. (MLC) (EMP 2008; 2007). MLC was established as a cement plant in the Labuan province, Malaysia in 1997 with the money from the Bakrie Capital Indonesia.

In July 2007, EMP released an astounding statement saying that Lapindo was no longer under the management of EMP due to the conversion of MLC's loans with its shares in Lapindo. From that moment on Lapindo has been transferred into the management of its new owner, MLC. In addition to the transfer, EMP stated also that MLC would take over all its indemnifies related to the Brantas Block and responsibility in financing the disaster mitigation in Porong (EMP 2008). Another clear evidence of MLC's presence in the mudflow incident is the establishment of Minarak Lapindo Jaya (publicly known as and thenceforth, "Minarak"), a new subsidiary of Lapindo which main duty is to deal with the transaction of land and buildings with the "inside map" victims.

Based on my readings into some documents of the government and the company, I discovered that the existence of MLC in the case is more than just to secure Lapindo's position in the wake of the mudflow but also to obtain the entire participating interests of the Brantas PSC. A couple of months before the conversion of MLC's loans to Lapindo's shares, in March 2007, Medco Energi divested its participating interest in the Brantas PSC to another the Bakries' affiliated company, the Prakarsa Group. Medco agreed with the transaction because MLC would stand behind Prakarsa in taking over Medco's obligation to the block and the mudflow (Bapepam-LK 2007). Furthermore, in December 2008, Santos unexpectedly announced that it had transferred its

participating interest to MLC. In addition to the transaction, Santos would disburse a final payment of USD 22.5 million to MLC in order to support the long-term disaster mitigation in Porong and therefore it would receive a release from any claims related to the block or the mudflow (Santos 2008). The transaction marked a full acquisition of the Brantas PSC into the hand of the Bakries, through MLC.

However, from the viewpoint of Lapindo and the Bakries the most dangerous threat comes from the spreading understanding of “anthropogenic disaster” over the mudflow. This could bring the company and the conglomerate to a more severe situation, that is, the Bakries has to insure all the expanding damages resulted from the mudflow and the social and ecological rehabilitation in Porong and Lapindo’s executives could be put on trial for resulting in such a catastrophic environment. Hence, “anthropogenic disaster” is a claim that Lapindo and the Bakries must deal with and contest.

#### **4.4. The formation of the “anthropogenic disaster” claim**

Very early in the morning of May 29, 2006, a reporter from the *Kompas* daily newspaper received an SMS from a colleague informing him that a gas leak had occurred in Porong.<sup>34</sup> The reporter went to the Renokenongo village without having breakfast. When he arrived, he detected a strong, sulfur-like smell from gas that had burst from beneath the earth’s surface. Also, he saw white smoke coming from a paddy field, together with a mixture of hot mud and water erupting from the same spot. The smoke affected two villagers who

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<sup>34</sup> The story is based on personal communications with Laksana Agung Saputra, the reporter, and early reports from the daily concerning the incident.

had already been taken to the nearest district's health clinic (*puskesmas*). That morning, External Relations Coordinator of Lapindo, Arief Setyo Widodo, held a press conference, stating that the company was still investigating what had caused the subsurface gas leak.

As of the conference finished, for he had not had breakfast, the reporter went to a nearby food stall (*warung*) to get a cup of coffee with which to begin the day. Knowing that her customer was a journalist, the stall's owner, Sri, accompanied him to a house rented by Lapindo's workers, where they met Syahdun, Lapindo's drilling foreman. He told the reporter, "The gas explosion was triggered by fractures in the borehole." The next morning, the statement concluded the first article to appear in the daily about the mud incident (Saputra 2006a); what is more, the daily was frequently quoted in subsequent reports of the incident. And it was the beginning of how the claim of "anthropogenic disaster" spreads following the wake of the mudflow.

### **Whistleblower**

A week after the initial eruption, on June 5, 2006, one of Brantas PSC's shareholders, Medco Energi, published an open letter to Lapindo.<sup>35</sup> On the letter, the company stated that the eruption had been triggered by Lapindo's drilling activity in the Banjar Panji 1 well. It also informed the publics that a few weeks prior to the incident (on May 18, 2006) a meeting had taken place, at which Medco's representatives had warned Lapindo of the need to install safety casing to a certain depth, but they intentionally neglected to do this. The

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<sup>35</sup> The letter, entitled "The Banjar Panji-1 well drilling incident," is written in English.

incident at the well, claimed Medco, was due to “gross negligence” on the part of Lapindo who did not follow the drilling procedure according to the plans. In addition to this, Lapindo’s representatives claimed in writing that everything was under control and all the damages, if any occurred, would be compensated through the company’s insurance cover as a mining company (EMP 2006a; 2006b). These initial statements indicated that there was a link between the eruption and Lapindo’s drilling activity.

In mid-August 2006, on behalf of TriTech Petroleum Consultant, Simon Wilson released a preliminary report in regard to contributing factors and causes of the loss of the Banjar Panji 1 well, addressed to the directors of Medco (Wilson 2006). TriTech was hired by Medco to provide a professional research service program to generally investigate the problems that occurred during the drilling operations at the Banjar Panji 1 exploration well and, in particular, to identify possible factors contributing to the loss of control of that well. Relying on documents provided by Medco and meetings with Medco’s geological and drilling staff at Medco’s office, Wilson pointed out a series of instances of Lapindo’s incompetence, which had resulted in the loss of the well. He considered Lapindo’s decision to remove the drill string from the borehole at midnight on May 28, while the well was in an unstable condition, as “incompetent and in contravention of good well control practice” (Wilson 2006, 2). In addition to this, he listed five contributing factors in the loss of the well, ranging from the planning phase to its execution (Wilson 2006, 2–3). They are: 1) the use of cement in measuring the probable weakening or fracturing of the well at a depth of 3,595 ft. (c. 1,096 m) between April 29 and 30, 2006; 2)

fractures inside the borehole somewhere at a depth of 4,241 ft. (c. 1,293 m) on May 28, 2006; 3) continued drilling without any casing to a depth of 8,500 ft. (c. 2,591 m); 4) if, Wilson claims, casing had been installed, it would have been easier to control the well afterwards; and 5) the decision to install the casing inside the Kujung Carbonate, not before it. He claims that if Lapindo had implemented all these measures differently, then the well could have been saved (Wilson 2006, 11–12). Although the report focuses more on the loss of the exploration well and does not mention the mudflow, it claims Lapindo's incompetency in the drilling of the Banjar Panji 1 well.

A month later, in September 2006, Neal Adams Services issued a report which was sent to Rico Moegandi, a lawyer for Medco Energi (Adams 2006). The report includes supplementary crucial information about the start of the mudflow eruption, something that had not appeared in Wilson's report. Adams refers to a "blowout," and illustrates two blowouts that occurred: the first was inside the well, "a subsurface blowout," which had led to a "well kick," and the second occurred aboveground, adjacent to the well.

According to the *Dictionary of Mining, Mineral, & Related Terms*, there are nine definitions of "blowout" and the closest definition to the abovementioned "subsurface blowout" is the fourth one:

the high-pressure, sometimes violent, and uncontrolled ejection of water, gas, or oil from a borehole. (The American Geological Institute 1997, 57)

And the following "aboveground blowout" refers to the ninth definition:

a general term for a small saucer-, cup-, or trough-shaped hollow or depression formed by wind erosion on a preexisting dune or other sand deposit, esp. in an area of shifting sand or loose oil, or where protective

vegetation is disturbed or destroyed; the adjoining accumulation of sand derived from the depression, where recognizable, is commonly included. Some blowouts may be many kilometers in diameter. (The American Geological Institute 1997, 57)

According to the same dictionary, the term “kick” has three meanings, but what was meant to happen in Banjar Panji 1 is “a quick snap of the drill stem caused by the core breaking in a blocked core barrel or sudden release of a momentary bind” (The American Geological Institute 1997, 297).

The primary cause of the subsurface blowout was, according to Adams, due to “numerous operational mistakes as well as errors and omissions” (Adams 2006, 5). Lapindo violated the original Well Plan by failing to install casing at 6,500 ft. (c. 1,981 m) and also at ~9,000 ft. (c. 2,743 m). Furthermore, he claimed that by installing casing string and proper cementing would have prevented the well kick and subsequent blowout that occurred aboveground. Similarly to Wilson’s discussed before, Adams identified the well kick as having occurred at a depth of 4,241 ft. (c. 1,293 m), when the string was pulled out of the hole from a depth of 8,737 ft. (c. 2,663 m) on May 28, 2006. He claims that although Lapindo had made several attempts, some of which were almost successful, to stop the well kick and the underground blowout, these attempts were actually the main cause of the subsequent aboveground blowout. He also saw some other errors as having been made in the drilling of the Banjar Panji 1 well that might have contributed to the blowout (Adams 2006, 7).

The report again raises the issue of Lapindo’s incompetence in the inconsistency in sticking to the original drilling plan. To depict the deviation made by Lapindo Adams presents a diagram comparing the actual Porong 1

well with both the planned and actual Banjar Panji 1 well. He marks two red circles on the actual Banjar Panji 1 well and a sentence in red and bold font that reads as follows, “Significant deviations from planned geology” (see Fig. 4.1). By showing it, in which the actual Porong 1 well is also depicted, Adams wanted to highlight the fact that *if* Lapindo had followed the drilling plan such an incident would not have occurred.

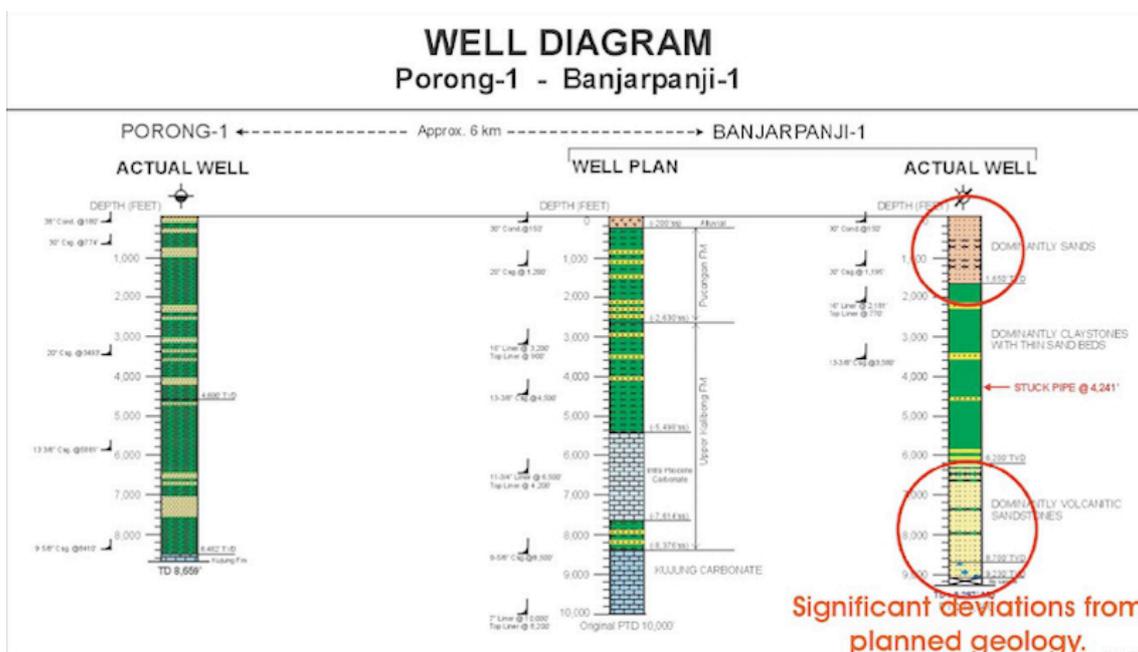


Fig. 4.1 Diagram of comparison between the actual Porong 1 well and the planned and actual Banjar Panji 1 well (Adams 2006: 21)

Furthermore, Adams gives more details about what was happening in the crucial moments leading up to the mud eruption, which can be summarized as follows:

On May 27, 2006, when Lapindo was preparing to drill to a depth of 9,090 ft. (c. 2,771 m) to 9,230 ft. (c. 2,813 m), the H<sub>2</sub>S probe sensor, located at

the *shale shaker*<sup>36</sup> area, detected 25 ppm of concentrated H<sub>2</sub>S. Some crews continued to drill, while others were evacuated to a briefing point. The drilling continued to 9,277 ft. (c. 2,828 m).

On May 28, 2006, when drilling from a depth of 9,283 ft. (c. 2830 m) to 9,297 ft. (c. 2,833 m) was resumed, *lost circulation*<sup>37</sup> occurred. Lapindo thus started to pull the drill string out/up to a depth of 8,500 ft. (c. 2,591 m) without any circulation (according to Adams, this action was very reckless. Instead of pulling the string out, Lapindo should have left it inside the hole).

Early on May 29, 2006, when the string was pulled out/up to a depth of 4,245 ft. (c. 1,294 m), Lapindo indicated a well kick had occurred and tried to shut the well. At the same time, a high concentration of 500 ppm of H<sub>2</sub>S was spotted surrounding the shale shaker. Lapindo had succeeded in killing the well, but been unsuccessful in pulling the string out. A few hours later, H<sub>2</sub>S bubbles were detected above the earth's surface and the remaining crews were subsequently evacuated.

The following day, on May 30, the intensity of the bubbles was found as having decreased and more time elapsed between the appearance/formation of each bubble than before. On the evening of May 30, 2006, Lapindo injected cement into the borehole and the number of bubbles decreased.

The next day (May 31), Lapindo continued to cement the borehole. The number of bubbles continued to decrease but on June 1, muddy water from the crater was noticed flowing from the area surrounding the well. Lapindo began to remove its equipment from the drilling site. On June 2, the operator ran the string into the hole to a depth of 3,536.5 ft. (c. 1,078

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<sup>36</sup> "Shale shaker" (or only "shaker") refers to "a mechanically vibrated screen through which a returning drill fluid is passed to screen out larger chips, fragments, and drill cuttings before the drill fluid flows into the sump" (The American Geological Institute 1997, 497).

<sup>37</sup> "Lost circulation" refers to "the condition during rotary drilling when the drilling mud escapes into porous, fractured, or cavernous rocks penetrated by the borehole and does not return to the surface" (The American Geological Institute 1997, 320).

m). While Lapindo worked, firing *guns*<sup>38</sup> and cracks around the rig were detected. On the next day (June 3), Lapindo started to derig the mast and the daily report ended here.

According to Adams, the bubbles at the rig site on May 29, 2006 were a clear indication of a subsurface blowout. Yet, instead of dealing with this issue, Lapindo focused more on preserving the well by cementing the borehole on May 30, 2006 (compare with Lapindo's report, EMP 2006a). Adams therefore claims that "if the focus had shifted to the blowout, the blowout may have been killed" and for that reason, considers the decision to continue to drill (on June 2) as behavior/action which "borders on criminal negligence as it endangered personnel, the rig and the surrounding environment" (Adams 2006, 13).

Obviously, the above-discussed reports can be interpreted as a part of Medco's strategies to absolve it of any future responsibility in the wake of the mudflow. Not only this, it has tended to place responsibility for the mudflow with Lapindo alone. However, since March 2007, along with the divestment of Medco's participating interest of the Brantas PSC to the Prakarsa Group (see 4.3), Medco has no longer been involved in the production of knowledge over the case. In the meanwhile, another participant of the Brantas PSC, Santos, responded calmly to the issue and waited for the investigation into the cause of the incident rather than believing the media's speculation about industrial

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<sup>38</sup> "Gun" refers to "a borehole in which the charge of explosive has been fired with no other effect than to blast off a small amount of material at the mouth of the borehole" (The American Geological Institute 1997, 249). It also relates to "blowout shot," "an improperly placed or overcharged shot of black blasting powder in coal (where used), frequently results in a mine explosion" (The American Geological Institute 1997, 57).

negligence (Santos 2006a; 2006b). Nevertheless, in the aftermath of the mudflow, Medco's statements—from the letter and the reports—have played an important role in the formation of the “anthropogenic disaster” claim by pointing out Lapindo's incompetency and inconsistency in the drilling of the Banjar Panji 1 well. Such a claim is very problematic for Lapindo and the Bakries; it is something they must contest.

#### **4.5. Scientific uncertainty**

In the course of the mudflow hazard, earth scientists, especially geologists, have become key actors in the struggle for knowledge, for they have been utilizing their scientific authority to produce authoritative knowledge concerning the mudflow's trigger. The existence of external factors, such as Lapindo, who may or may not have a direct influence on the formulation of scientific claims, therefore, must comply with specific regulations that are only applicable in the field of science in order to intervene in the production of knowledge of the disaster.

#### **The origin of the dispute**

From the outset, the argument of an anthropogenic mudflow has been dominating the scientific field to explain the unnatural phenomenon in Porong. The first scientific paper about it was published in the February 2007 edition of the Geological Society of America monthly magazine, namely the *GSA Today*. It was written by four British earth scientists proposing the argument that the mudflow is anthropogenic, instead of natural event (Davies et al. 2007). In the article the adopted name for the mudflow is “LUSI” (abbreviated from *lumpur*

*Sidoarjo*, meaning “Sidoarjo mudflow”), from which the term became so popular in the following scientific articles.

Davies et al. emphasize the issue of “the absence of steel casing” as one factor which caused to a fracture in the borehole (Davies et al. 2007, 6). This led to the fracturing of the well with the result that high pressure steam fissured the surrounding layer of soil and pushed the underground mud so that it spurted out elsewhere instead directly from the well. Interestingly, they ignore the possibility that an earthquake might have triggered the eruption for several reasons, but the most important here is the claim that:

[a]n earthquake could have generated new fractures and weakened the uncased section of the well, but it would be highly coincidental for an earthquake-induced fracture to form 200 m away from this well and provide the entire fracture network required for an eruption on the Earth’s surface. (Davies et al. 2007, 8)

Their argument is clear the mudflow is anthropogenic for it was triggered by the drilling activity. Nevertheless, the inference-making process in the article could be seen as being very problematic since it is based on a hypothetical interpretation on the part of the authors, rather than observations and reliable data from the field. Yet it is very easy for someone to refute or contest their claim, the conclusion has cornered Lapindo as the accused party of causing the eruption. In response to the publication of the article, as reported in the *Nature* magazine (February 22, 2007), Lapindo’s representatives, Bambang Istadi, personally contacted Richard Davies instructing him to revise the proposed conclusion, but he ignored them (Cyranoski 2007).

In July 2007, another scientific paper was published in the *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* journal. The leading author of the paper, Adriano Mazzini, is a professor of geology at the University of Oslo, Norway. Intriguingly, the name Bambang Istadi, representing EMP's (Lapindo's parent company) in-house geologist, appears as one of the article's co-authors (Mazzini et al. 2007). It is foreseeable that the article is a part of Lapindo's strategies to scientifically contest the anthropogenic claim that was proposed in the earlier paper and, at the same time, to counter it by proposing the argument for an "earthquake-induced mudflow." They argue that, because the drilling never reached the Kujung Formation, it cannot be said that the mud erupted in/from the borehole (Mazzini et al. 2007, 377, 384–385). They give two crucial statements: first, that a well kick never occurred and, secondly, that no fluids ever erupted *through* the well. Then, they argue, "the hypothesis of an eruption *entirely* attributed to drilling is inconclusive" (Mazzini et al. 2007, 386, emphasis added).

By any means, the word "entirely" in that sentence is somewhat tricky. On the one hand, it raises the possibility of the existence of other factors, besides drilling, which might contributed to the eruption, but, on the other hand, it does not directly suggest that the drilling was completely unrelated to the eruption. In this gap, they raised a theory that argues tectonic activity (an earthquake) could trigger particular geophysical phenomena (geyser, methane, and mud eruptions), even from a distance of several thousand of kilometers from the epicenter and with a time delay of a few days. Relying on the theory they propose a counter-argument stating that a major earthquake in Yogyakarta on

May 27, 2006 had a great impact on the geology in the surrounding area up to a hundred kilometers away, especially on the activity of the other mudflows in Java, as they observe in the following:

The most significant eruption was observed at Purwodadi mud-volcano (central of Java) that also erupted boiling mud and water. Between December 2006 and January 2007 new eruption sites with characteristics similar to LUSI appeared in the central (Bojonegoro mud eruption) and western (Serang mud eruption) part of Java following the earthquakes. (Mazzini et al. 2007, 384)

In addition to this argument, using data gathered from geochemical analysis to the materials, such as gas, water and the mud, that come up to the surface, they claim that the mud originated from a layer the depth of which is much lower than the deepest part of the well. This can be proven by the fact that the samples of material from inside the borehole were less smectic than samples taken from the mud eruptions, proving that the erupted mud came from a source different to the borehole (Mazzini et al. 2007, 379). The claim represents a stringent attack on the “anthropogenic” camp, for it argues that the mud is not originated from the borehole.

### **The politics of/in science**

Regardless of which argument is correct, the aforementioned articles raised oppositional scientific arguments and this signified the start of the scientific (and public) debate on what triggers the mudflow. A year later, in the same journal another article corresponding to Mazzini et al.’s (Mazzini et al. 2007) was published by Richard Davies and his colleagues (Davies et al. 2008).

This time, the name Rudi Rubiandi, the former head of the investigation team established by the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources (see 3.4), appears as one co-writer of the article. It was written collectively by the proponents of the anthropogenic argument to refute the earthquake theory. They present crucial data in defending the argument that the eruption was indeed an anthropogenic one.

Relying on two main sources data (i.e., historical records of earthquakes and drilling records from the Banjar Panji 1 well), the authors come out with some crucial statements. First, the May 27 earthquake was too far from Porong to have had a great effect on geological conditions and if there was a direct impact, the magnitude was too weak when it reached Porong to have triggered a mudflow on its own (Davies et al. 2008, 629, 631). The second and most frequent statement to be repeated in the article is that “there were larger earthquakes and located closer to Sidoarjo but did not trigger any mud-volcano elsewhere” (Davies et al. 2008, 629, 633, 635; cf. Manga 2007). Although they agreed with the fact that a subsequent earthquake (on August 8, 2007) had significantly increased the mud eruption rate in Porong, they disagreed with the conclusion that the earthquake was the “sole cause” of the eruption. They, therefore, claim that the May 27 earthquake was coincidental and nothing to do with the eruption previously discussed.

Furthermore, they recite two important statements from the anthropogenic argument: “well kick” and “subsurface blowout.” Relying on drilling records from the well which they got from Lapindo, they point out that the well kick really did happen on May 28, 2006 (Davies et al. 2008, 634), contradicting

earlier claims that such an event never occurred (see Mazzini et al. 2007, 386). While a well kick is a regular event in most drilling activity, without a proper casing being installed, the situation in the Banjar Panji 1 well turned into a disaster, and they claim that:

if the casing had been set deeper in the hole as was planned prior to drilling [...] [t]he chances of the pressure during the shut-in exceeding the higher leak-off pressure would have been much lower. In other words, the well may have tolerated the shut in pressure and not failed had the casing been set deeper in the hole. (Davies et al. 2008, 636–637)

The absence of steel casing was, according to them, only one of many contributing factors. The main trigger of the eruption was Lapindo's reaction of pulling the drill out and shutting the well to deal with an influx of fluids and gas in the borehole (cf. Adams 2006; Wilson 2006). Such actions, according to them, had increased the pressure in the borehole and led to an subsurface blowout (Davies et al. 2008, 637). In order to make their argument more convincing, the authors present a series of diagrams of their interpretation to show what happened inside the borehole at the crucial moment (Fig. 4.2). What is noteworthy here is the fact that the diagram aims to convince people that the eruption was actually anthropogenic. Indeed, diagrams are a group of statements to summarize all the arguments in a complex article in a modest way that even laypeople can understand them (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). In other words, instead of being just illustrations, diagrams, too, are "statements."

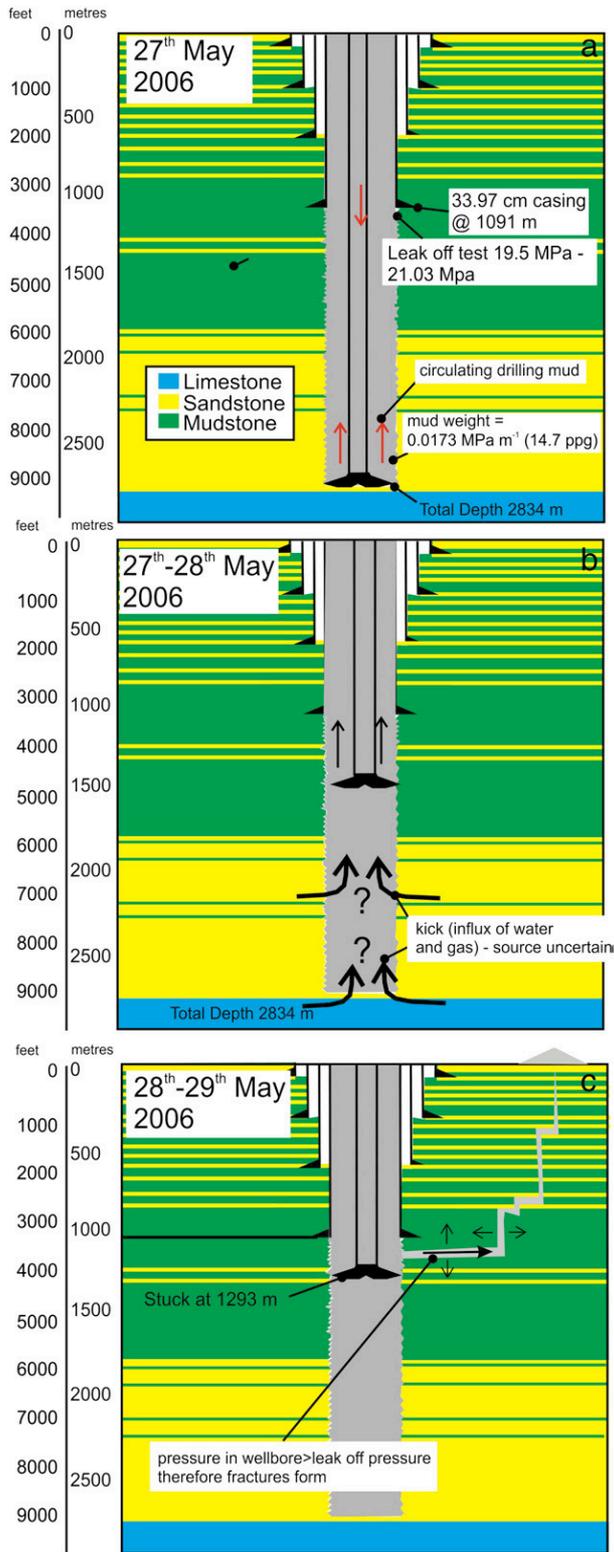


Fig. 4.2 Summary diagram of the Banjar Panji 1 well according to Davies et al. (2008:236)

## Replies and comments

The issue of what triggered the mudflow in Porong was raised at the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG) conference in Cape Town, South Africa (October 26-29, 2008). However, a final decision on the cause was not reached and the issue was brought to a vote in the plenum. Of 74 participants who had the right to vote more than half (forty-two) voted in favor of the view that the mudflow was anthropogenic, triggered by Lapindo's drilling (Mudhoffir 2013, 17–18). The rest are: three voters agreed that it was a naturally-born mud-volcano, caused by the earthquake of May 27; thirteen voted that the mudflow was a “hybrid”—the result of a combination of both drilling and the earthquake; and, sixteen voted for the need for further research on the matter before final conclusions could be drawn. Needless to say, those who voted for the “earthquake” theory were those affiliated with Lapindo (Batubara 2013).

Apart from the issue of these minority views, the voting mechanism at AAPG conference is very problematic for a scientific forum. Instead of using scientific and allegedly “objective facts” to come to a so-called rational, scientific conclusion, the forum used a mechanism of democracy-by-numbers. Thus, instead of settling the debate, the conference further muddled it and the question of what triggered the mudflow, and prompted counter-statements in other scientific forums. Accordingly, the voting was clear evidence of the existence of other claims to the “anthropogenic” one, such as the claims of “natural-born mud-volcano,” “hybrid mud-volcano,” and “still needing further research.”

Of all the different factions, the proponents of the earthquake theory have become more deliberate than others to prove that their claim is the most valid. One efficacious strategy of the earthquake theory has been the publication of the April 2009 special edition of the *Marine and Petroleum Geology* journal on “mud-volcanism.” Adriano Mazzini edited the volume that contains seventeen research papers about mud-volcanoes all over the world and includes one on Mars. Five papers about the mudflow in Porong are grouped together in a special section in the volume, which all of them draw on the theory that the volcano occurred naturally.

Among others, one paper in particular attempts to refute statements from the “anthropogenic” claim which appeared in earlier papers (Sawolo et al. 2009). Since the authors work for EMP, Lapindo’s parent company, the article also aims to convey the fact that the operator of the Banjar Panji 1 well, Lapindo, has carried out the drilling according the proper procedure, unlike what most other factions have alleged. They also try to claim that Lapindo is a professional company and only works with reputable subcontractors. What I find most intriguing about the article is the fact that the authors claim to have the most complete data about the drilling in the Banjar Panji 1 well and, for this particular reason, they claim that the conclusions drawn by other parties with no links to the company are therefore based on incomplete and insufficient data. They raise, for instance, the issue of the subsurface blowout as the main concern to be discussed in the paper (Sawolo et al. 2009, 1775, 1780). Based on the drilling record they have, the authors argue that a subsurface blowout

never occurred and any attempt to connect the mudflow with drilling in the Banjar Panji 1 well is therefore unacceptable.

In short, the article is another example of how Lapindo using its resources to contest the “anthropogenic disaster” claim in the field of science. What is more, they argue that Lapindo followed a proper drilling procedure. The kick was dealt with within three hours of the onset and the well was killed afterwards; it is therefore impossible for a subsurface blowout to have occurred (Sawolo et al. 2009, 1780). Thus, they do not see the pulling of the drill string out of the hole as an error but rather as an unintentionally successful attempt to kill the well.

Furthermore, they argue that if it is true that the mud came from the well, then it should have come out of the top of the well instead of from anywhere else (Sawolo et al. 2009, 1777–78). However, according to them, this is not what happened on May 29, 2006. Rather than erupting from the top of the well, the first eruptions were detected in other places adjacent to the well. Based on these findings, they simply claim that the drilling activity in the Banjar Panji 1 well had nothing to do with the eruption (Sawolo et al. 2009, 1780). Yet the authors do not propose an alternative answer to the question of what triggered the eruption, another article in the same volume uses the abovementioned article’s main findings to promote the claim of a naturally-born mud-volcano by arguing, again, that it was triggered by the May 27 earthquake (Istadi et al. 2009).

As the articles problematized statements of an anthropogenic mudflow eruption, it prompted a long commentary published in the same journal in

2010, which claimed that the conclusion of the article pointed out “inaccuracies, incorrect interpretations and deviations from the daily drilling report” as a result of “unrealistic” calculations (Davies et al. 2010, 1651). According to these authors, the previous article by Sawolo et al. begins with “incorrect assumptions” regarding the method of measuring the pressure at the bottom of the borehole. The statement problematized here is “the actual pressure at the bottom of the well” when the well was in a static position, because there was a maximum pressure limit in an uncased well that Lapindo could handle (Davies et al. 2010, 1653). However, there is a different version of the actual pressure allowed/permissible/that Lapindo could in fact handle. According to Sawolo et al.’s calculation, the pressure was lower because the well was in an open position (Sawolo et al. 2009), while according to Davies et al. the well was successfully closed with cement and this would have increased the pressure at the bottom of the well and prevented the mud from flowing directly from the well (Davies et al. 2010).

Davies et al. readdress the possibility that the eruption could have been triggered by the May 27 earthquake (Davies et al. 2010). Sawolo et al. mention a seven-minute time lag between the earthquake and mud loss occurring in the well (Sawolo et al. 2009, 1777), of which, according to Davies et al., it is too difficult to verify if the mud loss was really a result of the earthquake, despite the presence of other factors within this relatively short time lag (Davies et al. 2010). They then rehearse two key statements countering the earthquake theory. First, that the impact of the earthquake of May 27 on the geology in Porong was too low, given its distance from the well. Secondly, many other

earthquakes had a direct impact on the eruption site but none resulted in an eruption. And as a conclusion, they return to the anthropogenic claim:

We can be more specific about the critical errors which were: a) having such a significant open-hole section with no protection casing, b) overestimating the pressure the well could tolerate, c) after complete loss of returns, the decision to pull the drill string out of an extreme unstable hole, d) pulling the bit out of the hole while losses were occurring, and e) not identifying the kick more rapidly. (Davies et al. 2010, 1656)

The commentary prompted further discussion which was published in the same journal (Sawolo et al. 2010). Interestingly, the discussion begins with a paragraph containing a serious accusation targeted at Richard Davies and his colleagues, as it says:

It is obvious that Dr. Davies' papers lack the complete dataset; this is puzzling to the Authors [Sawolo et al., AM] since Lapindo Brantas have been open and offered scientists to examine and access their drilling data. Strangely, *Dr. Davies never took up the offer, and instead, they continue to "cherry-pick" drilling data that supports their hypothesis and disregarded the weightier data set that does not.* In the opinion of the Authors, if Dr. Davies and his colleagues were to integrate all the available data into their analysis, then their conclusions would likely be different. (Sawolo et al. 2010, 1658, emphasis added)

The incompleteness of the data used to draw the conclusion that the mudflow was anthropogenic was the main issue problematized in the discussion. In the article, Sawolo et al. claim that the conclusion drawn by Davies et al. in their previous articles (e.g., Davies et al. 2008; 2010) is

misleading because of the random and incomplete data used (Sawolo et al. 2010). In order to demonstrate how misleading it is, they include a table showing the different datasets used in their previous paper and their opponents (Sawolo et al. 2010). According to them, the absence of some crucial data led Richard Davies and his colleagues to draw a conclusion which is “nonsense,” even though publicly acceptable (Sawolo et al. 2010, 1661).

Furthermore, they address the issue of their method of measuring the pressure at the bottom of the well and why it led to their drawing a contrasting conclusion to Davies and his colleagues. According to Davies et al., the minimum pressure was estimated to be 21.29 MPa/km, slightly higher than the maximum compression that an operator could handle in the absence of a proper casing (21.03 MPa/km) (Davies et al. 2008, 634–635; 2010, 1653). The pressure was the main factor that led to the fracturing of the borehole. The fracture was followed by cracks in the surrounding soil and resulted in an aboveground blowout elsewhere, but not from the well. On the contrary, Sawolo et al. claim that, according to their calculation, the actual pressure was at the maximum limit of 17.27 MPa/km, far below the pressure allowed for the borehole (21.03 MPa/km) and that therefore the pressure would not have led to a fracture occurring inside the borehole (Sawolo et al. 2009, 1776; 2010, 1664). Additionally, they also depict a diagram and place it next to the diagram that appeared in Davies et al.’s paper (Davies et al. 2008), to claim that the source of the mud is not from the borehole or even exits *through* it (Sawolo et al. 2010, 1673; Fig. 4.3).

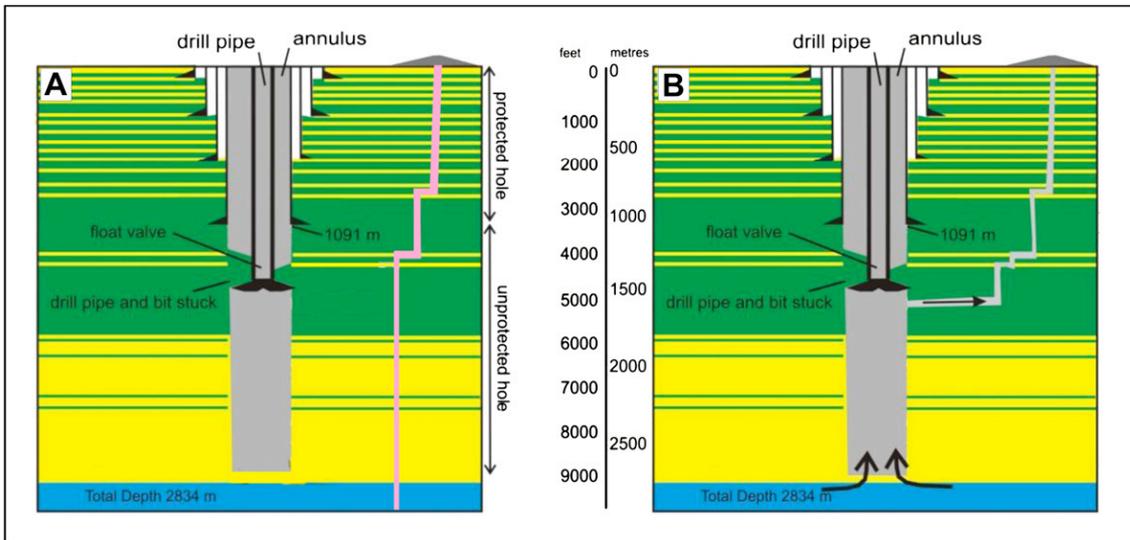


Fig. 4.3 Two different versions of the origin of the mudflow; natural (left) vs. anthropogenic (from Sawolo et al. 2010: 1673)

### End of argument?

The effort to claim of natural disaster over the mudflow in scientific field did not stop there. In late May 2011, there was an international geology symposium held in Surabaya to discuss the future of the on-going mudflow in Porong. It was organized by the Humanitus Sidoarjo Fund (HSF), in accordance with BPLS. HSF was just one program of an Australian non-governmental organization, the Humanitus Foundation. To run the program, the foundation received a million dollar grant from the Russian Institute of Geology to conduct further research into the on-going mudflow disaster in Porong. With the full support of Russian scientists, the HSF planned a project to map the geodynamics of the mudflow and its surrounding area in order to prevent future disasters from occurring in the region. Since the beginning of the program, the HSF has been cooperating and coordinating its work with BPLS and it has therefore increased the number of organizations that support the

argument for a natural-born mud-volcano, working together with the company and the government. Such a position can be seen in the composition of the speakers at the 2011 symposium in Surabaya. Of twelve speakers, only two geologists, Richard Davies and Mark Tingay, from the “anthropogenic camp” were invited to give their views on the anatomy and durability of the mudflow.

Additionally, HSF also funded a research conducted by a team of German geologists that has published a paper in the *Nature Geoscience* journal in July 2013 (Lupi et al. 2013). Relying on data from simulations, the authors claim that the enormous amount of seismic energy released by the May 27 earthquake resulted in an increase in volcanic activity on the island of Java, such as Mount Merapi in Central Java, Mount Semeru in East Java, and, of course, the mudflow in Porong. One remarkable statement which appears in the article concludes: “the borehole [of Banjar Panji 1, AN] was a witness to, and not the perpetrator of, the initiation of Lusi” (Lupi et al. 2013, 642).

By the time of writing this study (November 2014), there has been no further reaction from the proponents of the “anthropogenic disaster” camp. In 2011, however, Richard Davies and his colleagues wrote another article, which was published in the *Journal of the Geological Society, London*. This time, instead of addressing the debate concerning the trigger of the mudflow, they calculate the longevity of the mud eruption, which they predicted would take at least 26 years to decrease to less than 0.1 mega liter of mud per day and would remain active at a low level for thousands of years after that (Davies et al. 2011).

#### **4.6. Framing the media**

“Bad news is good news” is the law of media. Following the law, a disaster is always a facticity. A 1973 survey by the American Newspaper Publishers Association, for instance, found that “accident and disasters” were sought by 39 percent of the informants, it was the highest rate in comparison with political news (25 percent) and general/non-local/human interest news (25 percent) (Sood, Stockdale, and Rogers 1987). A disaster, thus, is always economically beneficial for the media industry. The more people are curious to know about what happens in the wake of a disaster, the more they will consume media. Simultaneously, reporting a disaster is a rare opportunity for the media to provide valuable aids to the local victims, to monitor the rehabilitation processes, and, of course, to level up the ratings and circulations.

#### **Self-censorship**

As discussed earlier in the chapter, Lapindo is a small part of a giant family conglomerate in Indonesia, the Bakries, which is a parent company of one media giant in Indonesia, namely Viva Media Asia (publicly known as and henceforth, “Vivanews”). Vivanews is an umbrella company of several national television channels (*TVOne*, *ANTV* and *Channel[V]*), which are broadcasting nationally, and some local media in East Java (such as, *ArekTV* and the *Surabaya Post* daily). Thus, just by leveraging these media Lapindo and the Bakries can give space to Lapindo’s representatives, members of the family, or other their-affiliated people (e.g., geologists, lawyers, politicians, cultural or

religious leaders and, even, victims) to articulate their statements about the mudflow and the disaster easier than victims and, even, government officials.

This situation has favored Lapindo to easily frame the disaster and disseminate it through these media. Yet, a more strategic practice to frame the disaster is performed by the Vivanews journalists. In these media enterprises the reportage of the Lapindo case is being monitored with “self-censorship mechanism” (Tapsell 2012). One of my interlocutors, a television journalist of one Vivanews media outlet, told me the rejection from the editor to do an in-depth reportage about the case (personal communication, August 2008). In another encounter, the same interlocutor said, “My media would not raise any critical news about the [Lapindo] case because everyone [in my media] is haunted by [Aburizal] Bakrie” (personal communication, April 2013). The fact suggests that there is hegemonic power over Vivanews journalists in making critical reports of the Lapindo case.

The practice to frame every single piece about the case continues in the naming of the event/process. In an interview, Karni Ilyas, former chief editor of *AnTeve* and currently news director of *TVOne*, argued that the media naming of a disaster, whether natural or industrial, should be referring to the place, as he gave some examples like “Bhopal” and “Chernobyl” (Ambarwati 2007 in Andriarti 2010, 80). Thus, according to him, the media should be using the term “*lumpur Sidoarjo*” (Sidoarjo mudflow), instead of “*lumpur Lapindo*” (Lapindo mudflow) to name the disaster in Porong (see 1.3). The argument was meant to respond to the contention of many journalists and media analysts in Indonesia for the intentional utilization of *lumpur Sidoarjo* in the Bakries media, for it is

problematic because it contradicts with the fact that most people are using the term *lumpur Lapindo* in everyday life conversations. It seems to many people, the using of *lumpur Sidoarjo* in the media has been an efficacious strategy to drive the social construction of the disaster (cf. Suryandaru 2009).

In addition to Ilyas's argument, Dhimam Abror, chief editor of the *Surabaya Post* daily, was very inconvenience with the term *lumpur Lapindo*, because it was meant that Lapindo is the cause of such a catastrophe (personal communication, March 2009). He raised an issue of the court's verdict saying that Lapindo is not guilty for causing the mudflow. He was referring to the verdict of the District Court of South Jakarta on December 27, 2007. Intriguingly, according to a critical reading of the verdict (Wibisana 2011), the judges' decision was full of awkwardness because there was a tendency of the judges to rule out the fact that all expert witnesses (e.g., the geologists) agreed to one condition: the region where the drilling performed is a prone area for mud-volcanoes to occur. The judges, according to this study, should be assessing two critical issues addressed by the plaintiff: first, did Lapindo design the drilling in purpose to prevent a mudflow to occur and, secondly, did Lapindo consider a mitigation plan if such would happen (Wibisana 2011, 141–143). Instead of addressing these issues, the judges bluntly decided that the mudflow was a natural-born due to the fact that the expert witnesses who stand for it outnumbered the expert witnesses who stand for the anthropogenic claim (Wibisana 2011, 139–140).

Despite public's criticism to the verdict, starting from the time of the verdict was announced it has been easier for Lapindo and its affiliated actors

to publicly raise and maintain the statement “Lapindo is not guilty by law.” With the existence of such a statement Lapindo does not have to talk much about what actually happened in the Banjar Panji 1 well and can easily dodge public’s accusation to take full responsibility of the disaster. For Lapindo, the verdict is “final and legitimate,” the mudflow is a natural disaster, and, by the same token, Lapindo should not be the party who is responsible for insuring the damages and rehabilitation but the government instead.

There has been also a claim that Lapindo is just another victim of the mudflow. However, instead of reclaiming all the cash that has been spent to handle the initial mitigation to the government, Lapindo has been carrying on the settlement of compensation of victims. In such a context, Lapindo sees its willingness to purchase villagers’ land and houses not as a legal obligation as it is indicated in the 2007 presidential regulation, but rather as the company’s moral and social responsibility indicated in the December 4 letter.

Another statement “following the directive of the Bakries’s mother” (*mengikuti perintah ibunda Bakrie*) is also frequently articulated by the family members and other Lapindo-affiliated actors in the media and other public occasions. Lapindo has been framing the money that it has disbursed to the victims as “the Bakries’ charity” (*sedekah dari keluarga Bakrie*) to those who suffer from the disaster. This, of course, contradicts with mutual understanding of most victims I had interviewed with. They see the act of disbursing the money is an obligation given to the company to redeem all the losses resulting from the mudflow. According to them, Lapindo has triggered the mudflow and taken something (land, houses and other properties) away from them and the

compensation is seen a “debt” that Lapindo must pay back to the victims. Thus, by Lapindo saying “the money was charity” means that the money has been given to the victims without a tendency to pay any debt. On the contrary, it is now the victims who are indebted to Lapindo or the Bakries. Such an understanding explains why Lapindo has been so easily and without a guilty feeling in postponing and altering the compensation mechanism to the victims as it has been indicated in the 2007 regulation.

What is more, in Lapindo’s progress report about the mudflow disaster (released in May 2011), it is mentioned that Lapindo is not the party who should be responsible for compensating the victims (Lapindo Brantas 2011). It has been saving the victims since at that time the government was still focusing on reconstruction and rehabilitation of the May 27 earthquake in Jogjakarta and Central Java. In other words, Lapindo is trying to change its image from “the bad guy” to “the hero” of the mudflow disaster.

### **“Commercial approach”**

Self-censorship is not the only strategy Lapindo applying to intervene the social construction of reality about the disaster in the media. With a huge economic capital, Lapindo has intruded into the other media groups. According to Dhimam Abror from the *Surabaya Post* daily, representing Lapindo’s viewpoint, at the first place the Bakries-unaffiliated media did not report the case proportionally and reported with a tendency to blame Lapindo for causing the mudflow (personal communication, March 2009). The tendency was getting stronger after the investigation team, led by Rudi Rubiandini,

declared that Lapindo drilling triggered the eruption sometimes in September 2006 and the team was representing the government, it was easy for the media to decry Lapindo for causing the eruption and demanding it to be responsible to recompense the victims and pay for the social and ecological rehabilitation in Porong. At that time, there was no systematic strategy of Lapindo to intervene in the social construction of the mudflow in the other media. But, following the issuance of the 2007 presidential regulation, Lapindo's executives started their regular visit to several media offices in East Java to supply updates and documents concerning the progress of the efforts the company had done. It was aimed so that the media could be "fairer" in writing reportages on the disaster, especially about positioning Lapindo.

The strategy was changing every time following the response of each media to such a visit. The attempt to steer the production of knowledge of the event/process through the media was getting more serious for the company prepared a special fund for such a purpose. Errol Jonathans from the *Suara Surabaya Media* group told me that Lapindo allocated one billion rupiah for each media in Surabaya. He said:

One day, Lapindo's representatives visited us. The objective of the visit was that they would like to thank *Suara Surabaya* for reporting the incident proportionally. With such a sacrifice, they wanted to accord us with something called "commercial approach" (*pendekatan komersial*). They brought one billion rupiah, but we rejected them. At the time we said, "*Suara Surabaya* only needs Lapindo's openness about the disaster." (Personal communication, February 2009)

The term “commercial approach” refers to a strategy to advertise in one media. It is used because Lapindo could not directly intervene in the news making process in certain media. Thus, by using economic capital, Lapindo started to buy more space for its appearance in various media and the approach was a success in certain media organizations. A Surabaya-based newspaper daily of *Kompas Gramedia Group* (publisher of the nation-wide *Kompas* daily), the *Surya* daily, for instance, took the offer and allocated a full-page “advertorial” (abbreviated from advertising and editorial) for six months in 2007. The advertorial page was designed as a “normal page” of the daily, marked with the choosing of font type and color and the layout of the headings, columns, and photos. Laypeople would perceive the page as a regular page of the daily because it was similar to the other pages. The decision to take an advertisement was the authority of the marketing division of the daily and had nothing to do with the activity of the journalist in the newsroom and therefore although the daily took Lapindo’s advertisement, former chief editor of *Surya* claimed that the newsroom was still independent in writing critical news about the case (personal communication with Dhimam Abror, March 2009). However, in the production of knowledge of the case, the “regular” news (about one or two per day) was incomparable to a daily full-page advertorial. Another Lapindo’s success in implementing the “commercial approach” was the appearance of an advertisement in *Kompas* daily on November 8, 2007, page 21. The advertisement showed an effort of Lapindo to counter the discourse of “anthropogenic disaster” and promote a discourse of “natural disaster,” by stating: “The experts assure that the events that occurred

mudflow in Sidoarjo is a natural occurrence, not the result of drilling by Lapindo Brantas Inc.”

### **The Surabaya Post case**

The economic capital of the Bakries was quite a thrill for some local media with serious financial crises, such as the *Surabaya Post* daily. The daily, first published in Surabaya, on April 1, 1953, was one prestigious newspaper in East Java. Abdul Azis established and ran it as a family firm. After he died, the wife, Toeti Azis, continued to run the daily. Unfortunately, until she passed away none of the children was willing to continue running the daily. They decided to close the firm and therefore the daily in 2002. After ceasing publication for several months, some of former employees of the daily established a new firm in accordance with the effort to continue the publishing of the daily. Since then, the shareholders and management of the daily have been changing several times. Eventually, in July 2008, the Bakries took over the management of the daily by buying its majority shares and set two prominent directors of Minarak Lapindo Jaya, Bambang Prasetyo Widodo and Gesang Budiarjo, as managing directors of the daily (Tapsell 2012, 237).

With this change, the daily's culture in reporting the mudflow disaster changed drastically. One reporter said in an interview in 2010: “We seldom write about it [the mudflow] now. The mud is still spewing out, but for us, it is like the earth swallowed it” (as quoted in Tapsell 2012, 238). Indeed, *Surabaya Post's* chief editor, Dhimam Abror, admitted that he had been treating every piece about the case with full of cautiousness:

The option was would *Surabaya Post* write stories about the mud with softer language or not at all. The decision was not to write it at all. It was taken without any pressure from the management. It was my decision as the chief editor. (Personal communication, March 2009)

That decision is however very problematic, for not to write about the case could be interpreted as another evidence to what Gamson et al. call the hegemony of media owners in the making of the (non-)news (Gamson et al. 1992).

### **The price of criticism**

The desire to develop a story about the mudflow disaster and its victims in the national media in Indonesia has to meet some other technical obstacles. In East Java, most national media established representative offices in Surabaya and other medium-sized cities in the province (such as Malang, Kediri, Madiun, Jember) but surely not in Sidoarjo. To cover the mudflow disaster in Porong many national media rely mainly on their Surabaya-based reporters, with sometimes a small assistance of journalists from other cities, especially Malang, was needed. In the course of the fieldwork, I discovered that not all national media have their own reporter(s) in gaining data about what is happening in Porong. Sometimes, they only use a stringer or contributor, who is paid accordingly to the number of published news. Although the contributor is working under the flag of a national media giant, he/she gets salary far under the local living standards and without any social and health insurance too. This raises an old issue of the relation between journalists' welfare and "*budaya amplop*" (meaning, "the envelope culture") in Indonesia. The culture refers to

the habits of journalists receiving, or in many cases “pursuing” for, money and other gifts from their informants.

For the economically unstable journalists, especially contributors, by any means *amplop* is very attractive. It is because the media where they work could not provide them with enough earnings, these journalists feel free in receiving gifts from their informants. The habit has been a serious problem for the production of knowledge of the Lapindo case and something that Lapindo notice with very well. Therefore, to intrude the production of knowledge concerning the Lapindo case in the other media, it is occasionally more effective for Lapindo to interfere in the very beginning of news making by fulfilling these reporters with their material needs (such as money, jackets, t-shirts or many other merchandise/facilities). Such a practice is sometimes very effective to tame journalists’ criticism to Lapindo in the framing of the case.

#### **4.7. Muddy politics**

##### **Aburizal and Golkar**

In the political arena, there are some crucial issues on how Lapindo could intervene the production of knowledge concerning the disaster in relation to the strategic position of Aburizal Bakrie in the national politic, especially his involvement in the Golkar Party (henceforth, “Golkar”), one of the oldest and the largest political parties in the country.

Golkar had been the ruling party for almost thirty-years of the New Order in Indonesia. After the resignation of the late president Soeharto in May 1998 marking the end of the New Order regime, the party was in a very serious

leadership crisis. Instead of dissolving the party, the cadres, led by Akbar Tandjung, the chairperson at the time, collected supports from more stakeholders, especially businessmen, and many businessmen, including Aburizal Bakrie, have been occupying several strategic positions in the party's structure. In contrast to the other political parties in Indonesia, to gain voters in the election Golkar does not rely on charismatic leaders, such as Megawati Soekarnoputri in PDIP (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan*, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle), Abdurrahman Wahid in PKB (*Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa*, the Nation Awakening Party) or Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrat*). With such a strategy, Golkar won the 2004 legislative election with 128 of 550 seats in the parliament, followed by PDIP (109 seats) and PKB (52 seats). The Democratic Party, Yudhoyono's political party, was a small party with less than 10 percent of the seats in the parliament. To win the 2004 presidential election, Yudhoyono had to run with Jusuf Kalla as vice president candidate, who was then appointed as the chairperson of Golkar (2004-2009). Thus, albeit the president was from the Democratic Party, the dominating political party in national politics at the time was Golkar in which Aburizal was one key cadre.

In a cabinet formed in October 2004, Yudhoyono appointed Aburizal as the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs before he redesignated him as the Coordinating Minister for Public's Welfare starting from December 2005 until the end of the first term, in 2009. Therefore, at the time the mud first erupted the leading figure of Lapindo's holding company was acting as an active minister in the cabinet. Calling from a political economy perspective, Schiller,

Lucas, and Sulistiyanto observe a serious conflict of interest in the government dealing with the mudflow in Porong for Yudhoyono was needing political support from Golkar and collecting economic supports from private sectors, including the Bakries, to finance his political campaigns for the 2009 election (Schiller, Lucas, and Sulistiyanto 2008, 63–65). Subsequent to his re-election for the second term of presidency (2009–2014), Yudhoyono did not designate Aburizal as one minister. It is because Aburizal was elected as the chairperson of Golkar in October 2009 replacing Jusuf Kalla. With such a position Aburizal's influence in the national politic has become increasingly formidable for he has an authority to control the party's members who sit in various strategic levels in the making of a political policy. To date, members and sympathizers of Golkar have been playing a strategic position in refuting the claim of "anthropogenic mudflow," although Lapindo or the Bakries does not directly employ or pay them. The ambiguous position of Aburizal who has one foot in both camps has been a critical issue in the disaster politics of the mudflow.

### **Conflict of interests**

It is notable here to address that the government, too, has a strong political awareness in defining the mudflow as natural phenomenon instead of anthropogenic. The Indonesian Audit Body (BPK)'s report shows some improprieties in Lapindo's natural gas exploration in the Brantas Block (BPK 2007). According to a regulation issued of the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources, every mining operator is compulsory to submit daily reports of its

drilling to the Directorate General of Oil and Natural Gas, representing the ministry. In practice, Lapindo never sent its drilling report and the ministry never gave a warning about it. The fact suggests that Lapindo's activity in the Brantas Block, including the drilling of the controversial Banjar Panji 1 well, has been running without strict supervisions from a governmental agency. Even more, when the investigation team found that the drilling had triggered the eruption, neither the directorate nor the minister immediately declared that the mudflow was due to an operational accident (BPK 2007, 11), of which could strengthen the criminal investigation on Lapindo.

The supervision from the Control Board of Oil and Gas Mining Activities (BP Migas) was oriented more on financial surveillance than technical issue of the drilling. BP Migas, which was established in 2002 as a governmental agency to control the oil and natural gas exploration and mining activities in Indonesia, never conducted an examination to Lapindo's drilling plan to make sure that it had designed in accordance to the good oil engineering practice. Additionally, BP Migas did not monitor the drilling of the Banjar Panji 1 well (BPK 2007, 11–12). From the beginning, still according to the same report, there have been several improprieties of governmental apparatuses in granting permission and letting Lapindo to drill the controversial well of Banjar Panji 1. There are, at least, two irregularities of the Regent of Sidoarjo in granting Lapindo a "location permit" (*izin lokasi*) of the Banjar Panji 1 well. First, the permit contravened the spatial planning of the regency that was indicated in a Sidoarjo regency regulation (No. 16 of 2003). According to the regulation, the area where the Banjar Panji 1 well was located should not be allocated for

industrial area, including mining. Secondly, the well was located less than five meters from a residential area, less than thirty-seven meters from public facilities (toll road), and less than a hundred meter from a main gas pipeline. This contravened the Mining Provisions Act (No. 11 of 1967), which indicates that exploration and mining wells should be located at least a hundred meter from vital objects, such as highway, railroad, residential area, and others public facilities. In addition to these irregularities, Lapindo's fraudulent strategy in obtaining a location of the Banjar Panji 1 well by utilizing a local authority (village head) and dishonest to the villagers that the ground would be used for chicken poultry instead of a natural gas exploration site (see 2.4).

Within such contexts, if the mudflow was defined as an anthropogenic, the legal and political consequences would not only affect Lapindo, but also various governmental officials, from village to minister level, who had contributed in permitting and letting Lapindo to drill the Banjar Panji 1 well in non-procedural and inappropriate ways. From here, one can see a shared interest of the government and Lapindo in promoting the mudflow as a natural disaster rather than an anthropogenic one. Therefore, it is very logical if both institutions are trying to secure their vulnerable position in the wake of the mudflow, even at the expense of other people, especially the victims.

One notable political maneuver is the designation of an expert staff of Aburizal at the office of Coordinating Minister of Public's Welfare, Sunarso, as the head of BPLS's executive body (see 3.4). It has been beneficial for both Lapindo and the government since BPLS has become a key institution representing the government's viewpoint and playing significant role to

promote the “natural disaster” claim. As discussed in 3.5, before the establishment of BPLS, the mitigation measures conducted by Timnas were shaped in a paradigm of “mining industry accident” of which was shifted to “spatial management” in April 2007, then “State’s treasury management” in 2009.

Currently, publics and the media perceive BPLS as the official body to handle the disaster and, therefore, the most knowledgeable and well-informed institution concerning the mudflow. However, in conducting its tasks BPLS has never been uncorrupted by the influence of Lapindo or Aburizal. On Wednesday, February 27, 2008, at the president office, Yudhoyono appointed Aburizal to preside a closed cabinet meeting concerning the strategy to handle the increasing problems in Porong following the unstoppable mudflow. The president, who had opened the meeting, had to leave early to meet the German Minister of Foreign Affairs, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and before leaving the meeting, he told the forum to find a way to compensate villagers of three new affected villages (i.e., Besuki, Pejarakan and Kedungcangkring). Aburizal started the meeting by saying, “I wish to implement the president’s directive as soon as possible” (as quoted in Setyarso, Gunanto, and Syaifullah 2008, my translation). On July 17, 2008, the government issued the 2008 presidential regulation in regard to the mudflow indicating the purchasing of an area in three villages with the state budget.

I noted public’s criticism over the government’s decision to compensate victims with the state budget since according to many people tax money shall not be allocated to bail Lapindo out from its responsibility for causing the

disaster. They are still thinking that Lapindo is solely responsible for the compensation of victims. However, as already discussed in chapter 3, the sharing of responsibility between Lapindo and the government has already mentioned in the 2007 regulation: Lapindo is only responsible for the area “inside the map” of impacted area and the government will be responsible for the area “outside the map” (art. 15 par. 1 & 3). The decision to allocate compensation of victims in state budget has to be approved by the parliament. But since Golkar in which Aburizal is a key cadre then chairperson was the majority in the parliament, it was very easy for such a decision to get approval of the parliament.

### **Ubiquitous normalization**

To date many politicians of Golkar, from national to local levels, have been acting as pivotal actors to counter public criticism about that decision. In the national level, for instance, the parliament established a Monitoring Team of Sidoarjo Mudflow Disaster (*Tim Pengawas Penanggulangan Lumpur Sidoarjo*, TP2LS) and appointed a principal politician of the party, Priyo Budi Santoso, to lead the team. The team consists of twenty-one members of the parliament and works separately from the structure of BPLS. The major task of the team is to monitor the implementation of the disaster politics, especially the utilization of the state budget in the mitigation. In reality, it has no direct authority in intervening the mitigation, including insuring the compensation payment. Nonetheless, instead of pushing Lapindo to pay the victims in cash as it is indicated in the regulation, it has become a key agent to support Minarak’s

alternative option of “cash and resettlement,” bartering the remaining compensation with a new house in Kahuripan Nirvana Village (KNV) (Rully and Kartoyo 2008).

On the provincial level, I noted the existence of a special team, of which members were some leading scholars of political sciences from top universities in Surabaya. One of them, Martono, was also the Provincial Chair of Golkar and served as the campaign leader for the twice-elected (in 2008 and in 2013) East Java Governor, Soekarwo. The team has a significant role in the normalization of the “anthropogenic disaster” claim by publishing a weekly newsletter, *Solusi* (meaning, “solution,” and also a language play of “*Lusi*” the abbreviation of *lumpur Sidoarjo*), which was distributed to numerous governmental offices, universities and media offices in East Java and in Jakarta. The aim was to supply strategic stakeholders of the country with updated information about the development of mitigation politics, yet according to the team’s viewpoint.

The main discourse proposed by the team in *Solusi* is: Lapindo should not be the one who is responsible to insure the compensation of victims and the social and ecological rehabilitation in the wake of the mudflow disaster, but the government instead. Accordingly, Lapindo should be seen as one among many victims of the disaster and the government should treat it equally to the other victims. For instance, one volume of *Solusi* (December 3, 2007) mentioned that Lapindo has the same right as other citizens in the nation to get the same protection from the government, but in reality since the beginning of the eruption the government has overlooked the right of the company by

burdening it with some responsibilities that should be performed by the government. The disaster politics over the mudflow is interpreted by *Solusi* as a way of the nature telling the nation about a severe crisis of leadership in the government.

In the Sidoarjo level, I noted that Golkar has been recruiting some victims as its cadres and promoting them as legislative candidates for the 2014 election.<sup>39</sup> One intriguing cadre of the party was perhaps Mahmudatul Fatchiyah, the former village head of Renokenongo who had facilitated Lapindo in getting a location for the drilling of Banjar Panji 1 well (see chapter 2). She was promoted as the legislative candidate from the party for the Provincial Council. Another strategy of the party in the regency level was to promote Bambang Prasetyo Widodo (director of Minarak Lapindo Jaya and the *Surabaya Post* daily) as the regent candidate, bundled together with Khoirul Huda, the leader of the association of Lapindo's mudflow victims (*Gabungan Korban Lumpur Lapindo*, GKLL), as the vice regent candidate in the 2010 regent election (Widianto 2010). At the same time, the Democratic Party promoted Yuniwati Teryana, Vice President of External Relation Lapindo Brantas, as the regent candidate, while the vice regent candidate was the regency chair of Democratic Party, Sarto. My activist-interlocutors view the candidacy of Lapindo's or Minarak's representative as the company's political maneuvers to take control over the local politics at the regency. Fortunately,

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<sup>39</sup> The modus also applies to other political parties recruiting disaster victims, especially group/local leaders as legislative candidates in both national, provincial, and regency levels for the 2014 election.

none of the candidates won the election. The winner was the former vice regent of Sidoarjo, Saiful Illah, with more than 60 percent of votes.

### **Unforgiveable sin**

Approaching the 2014 legislative and presidential election, the national political situation in Indonesia was heating up. In May 2012, Aburizal declared to run for president from Golkar. He was very sure that the mudflow disaster would not be a burden for him or the party. Even more, he claimed that ninety percent of the compensation have been paid to the victims (SAT 2011). However, a couple of months after the declaration, in July 2012, a political survey conducted by a polling firm showed that, amongst all strong candidates for the Indonesia's next president, Aburizal's popularity reached the lowest point, with only 4.4 percent. Grace Natalie from the firm said, "the main reason they disliked Ical [Aburizal's nickname, AN] was the Lapindo mudflow" (Dewi 2012). The polling represents the fact that the publics in Indonesia still believe that the mudflow is a drilling-error. Furthermore, in numerous talks with environmental and social activists, I learned that the Lapindo case is repeatedly attributed as Aburizal's "unforgivable" political sin.

Lately, I noted that more and more politicians of Golkar are trying to straighten out Aburizal's position in the Lapindo case, although without a proper understanding and suitable data about it. The case has become a precarious subject that has to be managed properly not only by Aburizal, but also by all members of the party in order to obtain votes in the 2014 elections. Recently, the party is the runner-up in the parliament election, with 91 of 560

seats in the parliament, behind the winning party, PDI-P, with 109 seats. With such an outcome, Golkar has to make a coalition with other political parties to promote its president candidate. Unfortunately, no political party wanted to join Golkar to support Aburizal's presidential candidacy. As a result, the party has to merger with the Gerindra Party (*Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya*, the Great Indonesia Movement Party) to promote an ex-military general, Prabowo Subianto, as their president candidate. Such facts show that even with such a huge effort to normalize the Lapindo case, Aburizal has yet to succeed to clean his public image that has been tarnished by the case.

#### **4.8. Contesting the disaster, reviving the discourse**

As mentioned at the outset, the chapter focuses on Lapindo's strategies in interpreting the newborn mudflow in Porong. To understand Lapindo's positionality in claiming the mudflow, one must consider it as a part of a family conglomerate giant in Indonesia, the Bakries, and how it has been influencing the nation's politics. In daily talks, it is very difficult to distinguish between Lapindo and the Bakries when having a conversation with victim-informants. In the eye of these victims, as the next chapter will show, Lapindo and the Bakries have become a single entity in the power battle over the mudflow.

Lapindo is interconnected with other subsidiaries of the Bakries, such as Energi Mega Persada (EMP), Minarak Labuan Co. (MLC), Minarak Lapindo Jaya (Minarak) and Vivanews (the media enterprise of the Bakries). Being a part of the Bakries has benefitted Lapindo for the leading figure of the family, Aburizal Bakrie was acting as a minister in the cabinet and currently is the

chairperson of Golkar, one of the ruling parties in the country. Lapindo has been easily intervening the social construction of the mudflow by delivering their version of truth concerning the incident, which induces public's confusion (Lim 2013). Currently, there is a polarization of two most conflicting arguments concerning the origin of the mudflow: anthropogenic (drilling-trigger) and natural (earthquake-trigger) (Batubara 2013; Drake 2013). The first emerges for there is a presumption that the eruption is triggered by Lapindo's drilling of the Banjar Panji 1 well. It has been dominating public opinion therefore to a certain extent has become truth for the publics (cf. Mudhoffir 2013). The latter blames a major earthquake for triggering the eruption, which is proposed first by Lapindo, then also by the government.

The chapter addresses the claim-making process of the "natural disaster" claim in three different fields of social construction of reality: science, the media and political arena (Hannigan 2006, 64–66). In the field of science, Lapindo has been collaborating with other earth scientists to refute the preexisting claim of "drilling error" over the mudflow. As a counter, Lapindo's in-house geologists have been promoting "natural disaster" claim over it. However, science is another field of power struggle, as Pierre Bourdieu argues:

The 'purest' science is a social field like any other, with its distribution of power and its monopolies, its struggles and strategies, interests and profits, but it is a field in which all these *invariants* take on specific forms. (Bourdieu 1975, 19, emphasis in original)

Indeed, it is due to the nature of uncertainty in science Lapindo has an opportunity to dispute a claim and counter it with another claim. Calling for Foucauldian theory of discourse, I problematize how Lapindo's claims are

evidence of power exercises through various practices of convincing scientific audiences that the company's claim to be the truest and others' to be wrong.

Truth is however just another historical category and therefore the will to truth is always problematic (O'Farrel 2005, 83). The main concern is beyond just the question of which claim is true and which is not, but more of what are the political consequences if certain claim is considered to be true. On the one hand, if it is true that the mudflow is anthropogenic, Lapindo will bear all the damage resulted from the disaster and can be criminalized for performing such a reckless drilling. On the other hand, if it is proven the earthquake initiated the eruption, Lapindo will not be responsible for anything but the government instead.

In the field of mass media, as part of the Bakries, Lapindo can easily utilize the conglomerate's media enterprise (Vivanews) to promote the "natural disaster" claim by reframing certain facts and pinpointing some others that may benefit the company. One remarkable and intriguing reframing is concerned with the money that Lapindo has spent for the victims, which is not framed as a "legal obligation" (as the regulation indicated so) or "paying debt" (as most victims though so) but rather as "alms" or "charity." It seems to that Lapindo is trying to reframe its image from "the bad guy" to "the hero" of the disaster. As a result, many victims feel that they are now indebted to Lapindo or the Bakries. In the political arena, the interest of Lapindo to claim "natural disaster" over the mudflow coheres with the government's interest for there are many irregularities at multi-layered governmental levels in permitting and letting Lapindo to do the drilling of the controversial Banjar Panji 1 well as well as

other wells in the Brantas Block. The scenario is: if the mudflow is proven to be anthropogenic, there will be many government officials, from village to minister levels, dragged to the court for their contribution to the reckless drilling.

Hereinafter, efforts to defend the “natural disaster” claim should be view as the strategy of both Lapindo and the government in securing their position in the aftermath of the mudflow incident. The chapter describes how Lapindo has been dealing with the mudflow and by any means Lapindo has become a key actor in enlivening and reviving the battle of power over the disaster.

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## Chapter 5 | Muddied Memories

### 5.1. “Fooled”

Fooled

My home was my heaven, my hamlet was  
my playground, at which we cheered,  
peasants were happy

But now everything is just a story,  
you fooled me with the development and  
the foundation of it is my suffering

Now there is no more heaven, no more  
playground, no more rice to harvest, no  
more room to breathe easily

Hail, the greedy rich! Hail, the evil ruler!  
Don't blame us for our resistances for you  
have disturbed, destroyed and ruined my  
dreams

*Tertipu*

*Rumahku adalah surgaku, kampungku  
adalah ruang bermainku, di sana kami  
bersukaria, petanipun bahagia*

*Tapi kini semua tinggal cerita,  
kau tipu aku dengan pembangunan, dan  
pondasi bangunan itu adalah deritaku*

*Kini tak ada lagi surga, tak ada lagi tempat  
bermain, tak ada lagi panen padi, tak ada  
lagi ruang untuk bernafas lega*

*Wahai orang kaya serakah! Wahai  
penguasa durjana! Jangan salahkan jika  
kami melawan karena kau mengusik,  
merusak, dan menghancurkan mimpiku*

The poem was written by Cak Irsyad, the founder and leader of *Sanggar Alfaz* of Besuki Timur (see 1.7). One child victim read it in the course of the six-year anniversary of the mudflow, on May 29, 2011.<sup>40</sup> The poem was among many performances of the victims commemorating the mudflow. Interestingly, it does not mention anything peculiar about the mudflow or any environmental hazard but rather addresses one crucial issue: development. Indeed, based on my countless encounters with many victim-informants, I learned that most of them identify themselves not just as victims of an environmental hazard (the mudflow) but also as victims of human politics (see 2.6). It is something that

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<sup>40</sup> Due to my absence in the 2011 commemoration, I am indebted much to Lutfi Amiruddin and Daris Ilma for their priceless fieldnote.

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Oliver-Smith calls “disasters of development” which is typically marked by the increase in social resistance and civil disobedience (Oliver-Smith 2010).

Resistance, then, becomes one means for powerless actors in their existence in society. As a matter of fact, resistance has become one focus of some studies of power as it shows the exercise of power in various power relations even by the “powerless actors” (e.g., Dwivedi 1999). To Foucault, resistance and disobedience are evidence of how power is being exercised (Foucault 1978) and therefore it is easy to argue for such a standpoint that victims’ resistance and disobedience exist as a counter to power exercise of other actors of the disaster (i.e., the government and Lapindo). The stronger the government and Lapindo insist on “natural disaster” claim, the stronger the victims persist in defending a counter-claim of “anthropogenic disaster” over the mudflow.

Obviously, in the wake of a disaster victims are frequently understood as powerless parties who are depending on the help of others. However, throughout this chapter, I intend to show that the mudflow victims are not as powerless as most people would think. Instead, they are very creative to develop their own agency referring to specific cultural traditions that allow them to present their own interpretation of their situation. Quite unexpectedly, in the course of the fieldwork I discovered that the “anthropogenic disaster” claim has been enduring among victims not merely because of their resistances to the government or Lapindo, but also due to some preexisting cultural narratives in Javanese mythology about an idea that disasters as well as mudflows are never entirely natural events. These traditional narratives, of

which symbols were manifested in several commemorative practices of the mudflow, have facilitated victims to preserve the claim of “anthropogenic disaster.” By persisting with such a claim, mudflow victims become another prominent actor of the Lapindo case.

## **5.2. On collective memories**

The last two chapters have discussed how two key actors of the disaster, i.e., the government and Lapindo, produce, circulate, and maintain particular statements to promote the claim of “natural disaster.” While Lapindo, with its political economy resources, have been trying hard to steer the discourse in several fields of the social construction of reality about the mudflow (chapter 4), the government has been playing significant role in the field of policymaking and disaster mitigation (chapter 3). The present chapter aims to address how another prominent actor of the case, disaster victims, has been playing an important role in reviving the battle of power concerning the disaster through preserving a counter-discourse of “anthropogenic disaster” by maintaining their collective memories of the incident. The chapter will show how collective memories are never interest-free because they represent the struggle of victims in resisting to the “natural disaster” claim that the government and Lapindo have promoted.

“Collective memory” has been one key concept in the field of sociology of knowledge coined by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the beginning of the twentieth century (Brian, Jaisson, and Mukherjee 2012). Nevertheless, it was the World War II that has been considered as one major event for the

burgeoning study of collective memory nowadays (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011, 29–36). The survivors and witnesses of the war were obliged to recollect and share their memories of the crisis in the purpose of writing historiography, a production of knowledge about the event/process. While scholars began to construct historiography about the hostile but prominent event/process in the world history, the media industry also started to produce images, fictions and documentaries about the horror and the heroic of the event/process. According to Halbwachs, historical recollection tends to establish and defend an objective truth about the past, while social remembrance aims to search anything in the past that is relevant for our present lives. In other words, history is “the past that [is] no longer an important part of our lives,” while collective memory is “the remembered past that actively shapes our identities” (Olick and Robbins 1998, 111).

However, since 1960s there has been critiques concerning the subjectivity of historiography, which were continued by postmodernist thinkers in 1980s, who argue that historiography is just another means of ideological domination (Olick and Robbins 1998). Truth claim of a historiography is nothing but an attempt to socially reconstruct meanings about past event/process for particular political purposes in the present and the future. “History,” Foucault writes, “has been the object of a curious sacralization” (Foucault 1998, 280). It has a propensity to functioning certain collective memories in sustaining a certain regime of truth. Therefore, both history and collective memory are another discursive fields in which power is being competed.

To understand the work of collective memories in the social reconstruction of reality, Halbwachs proposes a distinction between “autobiographical” and “historical” memory. He writes,

There is reason to distinguish two sorts of memory. They might be labeled if one prefers, internal or inward memory and external memory, or personal memory and social memory. I would consider more accurate “autobiographical memory” and “historical memory.” The former would make use of the latter, since our life history belongs, after all, to general history. Naturally, historical memory would cover a much broader expanse of time. However, it would represent the past only in a condensed and schematic way, while the memory of our own life would present a richer portrait with greater continuity. (Halbwachs 1980, 52)

Sociologist G r me Truc elaborates autobiographical memory as the reconstruction of the past from our own personal experiencing the event and historical memory from the secondary, fabricated of historical records (documents, media, witnesses’ testimonies) (Truc 2011). Elaborating Halbwachs’s theory, British sociologist Paul Connerton classifies three types of memory (Connerton 1989). The first he calls “personal memory,” referring to any acts of remembering of a subject’s particular life history event: “I did such and such, at such and such a time, in such and such a place” (Connerton 1989, 22). A second is “cognitive memory” in which “the person who remembers that thing must have met, experienced or learned of it in the past” (Connerton 1989, 22). A third type, which is the most prominent concept to develop in this study, is “habit-memory,” or the action to not only recollect both autobiographical and historical memories of the past, but also to

articulate those remembered memories into particular social performances and bodily practices (Connerton 1989, 22–24). Habit-memory is a key to understand commemorative practices as not just merely practices in which people share their personal experiences and historical records of the past. Rather, in those practices, people are contesting and challenging others' experiences and historical records of the past and such is closely related to the notion of power. To remember is therefore not merely just a psychological process but also an exercise of power because it establishes powerful narratives of the truth about past events.

Reconstruction of the past is therefore never been a neutral process, for there exists inter-subjective conflicts amongst individuals and this could have influence the recollection and reconstruction of memories of the past (Forrest 1993, 446). In the case of disaster commemoration, victims have an opportunity to articulate their own meanings and memories about how they deal with environmental hazards. In this sense, disaster commemorations are more than just some acts to recollect and represent catastrophic event/process in the past to the present time but also to give new meanings of such an event/process for particular future purposes. This chapter argues that disaster commemorations are actually discursive fields in the sense that they allow power to exist through the recalling and disremembering particular memories related to the disaster and its subjective meanings to the remembering individuals. They are distinctive social times in which agencies of disaster, especially disaster victims could have a chance to select some of their memories and include/exclude them in several practices to commemorate the

event/process. Moreover, in these particular moments, disaster victims have an opportunity to add or modify some meanings of the event/process.

Nonetheless, it is not the intention of this chapter to examine the accuracy of those recalled memories. What matters is how certain memories about the disaster were organized in accordance to preexisting narrative structures and how commemorative performances contributed significantly in the knowledge production of the disaster. The chapter is grounded on the data that are collected from a series of fieldwork in the disaster anniversaries (every May 29). Based on the observation into five disaster anniversaries (in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014), I discovered no uniformity of how victims commemorate the mudflow; nonetheless, I detected some coherencies between the structure of those commemorative practices and the structure of some narratives in the Javanese culture, especially about disasters and mudflows. Hence, in this chapter, I will focus on describing some of these narratives and discuss them in relation to particular symbols appeared in some disaster commemorations performed by disaster victims as their effort to exist as one prominent actor of Lapindo case.

### **5.3. Muddling with history**

The section describes the origin of how “traditional narratives” become discursive in the course of the mudflow in Porong. In 4.4 & 4.5, I have outlined two competing “scientific” claims in regard to the origin of the mudflow in Porong. Each claim has been proposed and defended by some earth scientists (e.g., geologists) in various “scientific” forums. The polemic among these

scientists is spinning around the issue of whether the eruption was triggered by a reckless drilling of Lapindo Brantas or by a major earthquake occurred two days prior the first eruption was detected. The former leads to anthropogenic disaster claim, while the latter leads to natural disaster claim. Obviously, it has been the intention of Lapindo to escape from all liabilities resulted from the mudflow. Lapindo has been one key actor in enlivening and reviving the battle of power in the course of the mudflow by intensively, aggressively promoting some statements to support the earthquake theory in certain discursive fields of social construction of reality (chapter 4).

In addition to Lapindo, there is also the government that has been unintentionally promoting the natural disaster claim. According to my critical readings to mitigation policies of the mudflow (chapter 3), I discovered that these policies do not explicitly mention about what has triggered the mudflow as well as they do not indicated whether the mudflow is natural or industrial. Instead of being a strategy for disaster management, those policies are suggesting some schemes of the management of spatial and state proprietary. Nonetheless, there has always been a tendency from some governmental apparatuses to maintain the claim of natural disaster in several public forums. One forum that is important for the chapter is a joint convention of IAGI (the association for the Indonesian geologists), HAGI (the association for the Indonesian geophysicists), and IATMI (the association for the Indonesian petroleum engineers) in November 2007 in Bali. The conference was the beginning of the discursiveness of the so-called “cultural interpretation” of the mudflow in scientific forum, and then continued in other discursive fields.

In that so-called “scientific” forum, one geologist, Awang Harun Satyana, was delivering an intriguing paper which focuses on the historiography of mudflows in Java (Satyana 2007). His argument followed an idea that environmental hazards were determining factors for the collapse of two great empires of Jenggala and Majapahit in the Ancient Java. Yet the idea is not anew since some scholars have argued for it, but due to the lack of archaeological and historical evidence no one can be sure of what specific environmental features that have caused it (cf. Rahardjo 2011). Hilariously, relying on the data taken from three works of Javanese literature, such as *Serat Pararaton*, *Serat Kanda* and *Babad Tanah Jawi*, and one popular Javanese folktale of *Timun Mas*, Satyana claimed that the hazards in these texts were mudflows. Thereby, he wanted to reinforce the idea that mud-volcanic eruptions are regular natural features in Java and, when he learned from the dimension of the current catastrophic mudflow in Porong, he claimed that these particular features were the main causes for the collapse of two major empires in the Ancient Java. The following paragraphs will retrace some data from the sources with a strong intention to show that Satyana’s conclusion is very problematic for some reasons.

### ***Serat Pararaton***

The first work of Javanese literature, which was cited by Satyana, is *Serat Pararaton* (Book of the Kings). He claimed that the event *Pagunungan Anyar* (Javanese, “the new mountain”) was a massive, catastrophic eruption of a mudflow leading to the collapse of the Jenggala Kingdom. According to my

own reading of an English translation of the book (Phalgunadi 1996), the focus of the book is not about how the reign of Jenggala ends, but rather about the origin of the Singhasari, then Majapahit kingdom (cf. Berg 1964). The book also consists of a list of the kings and some major events during the reign of both kingdoms. It mentions the event *Pagunungan Anyar* and the year of when it happened (c. 1371 AD). However, it is not clear whether the event was a mudflow or just a regular volcano as well as was it the major cause for the collapse of the kingdom. Thus, relying on what the book is trying to tell, one could argue the conclusion drawn by Satyana to claim the cause of the collapse of the Jenggala kingdom was due to a mud-volcanic eruption cannot be accounted. The possibility of natural hazards as major factors to the collapse of the kingdom is still open for further discussion, but to arrive at such a conclusion one needs reliable historical and archaeological evidence.

### ***Serat Kanda and Babad Tanah Jawi***

The lack of historical or archaeological evidence is also a primary concern to discuss Satyana's readings to *Serat Kanda* (Book of Tales) and *Babad Tanah Jawi* (the Origin of Java). In this case, he claimed that the event Guntur Pawatugunung (Javanese, "thunder of a rocky mountain") was a mudflow and it was the natural hazard that has led to the collapse of the Majapahit Kingdom.

There has been a long debate among historians in the utilization of both books as the sources for Javanese historiography owing to the obscurity of who wrote them (Braker 1980; Ricklefs 1972; Florida 1995). Pigeaud categorizes the two books into the same genre of Javanese literature in the

sense that they were written in the eighteenth century and for the purpose of interpreting the beginning of Islamic courts in Java (Pigeaud 1967). What makes them different is the fact that *Serat Kanda* is one variant of *Babad Tanah Jawi* (henceforth, “*Babad*”) which can only be found in the Surakarta Palace (cf. Day 1978; Ricklefs 1979). Indeed, there are many other versions of *Babad* but mainly the moral story is mainly about an idea that the sultans of Java are descendants of both the Prophet Muhammad and the kings of Majapahit (Johns 1964). Likewise, the rise of Islamic courts, according to *Babad*, is the revival of Java after the fall of the previous non-Islamic empires. As such, *Babad* is not focusing on the collapse of the Majapahit Kingdom but rather trying to tell the people about the rise of Islam and Islamic courts in Java as something that has been predicted before. This phase is portrayed to be more serene than the struggling years of the preceding Singhasari and Majapahit reigns, as it is described in *Serat Pararaton*.

According to my own reading of an English translation of one version of *Babad* (Ricklefs 1978), it is mentioned the event Pawatugunung, but again similar to the event Pagunungan Anyar in *Serat Pararaton* it is unclear whether the event was an eruption of a mudflow. Therefore, to claim that the event Pawatugunung was a mudflow and that it has led to the fall of the Majapahit Kingdom requires more historical and archaeological evidence other than just relying on these sources. In spite of the lack of evidence, it seems to me that Satyana’s reading into *Serat Kanda* was superficial. I noted a small section of the book telling about the existence of a salt-water lake on Java, which is apparently to be the Bledug Kuwu in Grobogan regency, Central Java (Pigeaud

1968, 358). Bledug Kuwu has been the most popular preexisting mudflow in Java and therefore the miss to discuss this issue can be seen that Satyana was careless in reading that book—that is, if he did actually read it.

Furthermore, from the etymology of the term *bledug*, I shall argue that the Javanese do not correlate mud eruption with a volcanic activity. Its literary means “a sudden and forcible bubble” (in other contexts, it can also mean “dust” or “baby elephant”). It is closer to the Indonesian *letupan*, “bubbles” (as we find in boiling water) than *letusan*, “eruption” (of a volcano or a bomb). Of the latter the Javanese would refer it to *jeblug* (“explosion”). The term has been recorded in the early nineteenth century colonial report of a visit to Bledug Kuwu (Goad 1817). Thus, referring the events Pagunungan Anyar and Guntur Pawatugunung to mudflows juxtaposes with the categorization of *bledugs* as a volcanic activity of which is only applied for geologists, not for laypeople.

### **The *Timun Mas* folktale**

Another problematic issue in Satyana’s paper was the fact that he utilized a popular Javanese folktale of *Timun Mas* as one source of his historiography of mudflowes in Java. The folktale can be summarized as follows (Satyana 2007, 25–27):

Once upon a time, there was a peasant widow, Mbok Sirni, who wanted very much a child. Buto Ijo (“Green Ogre”), who heard to her grief, accosted Sirni. Ijo was willing to fulfill Sirni’s wish under one condition. When the child has grown up, she must give that child for his meal. Because she was so longing to the presence of a child, Sirni agreed to the terms given. The ogre gave her a cucumber seed to be planted immediately. The seed grew fast and bore a large gold-colored cucumber.

Curious with the cucumber, Sirni split it and she found a baby girl. She was named Timun Mas ("Golden Cucumber").

Timun Mas grew into a lovely girl, to whom Sрни was very fond. One day Buto Ijo came and wanted to recollect Sirni's promise, delivering the child for his meal. Sirni was very sad because she has devoted her love to Timun Mas. She told to Ijo that that time Timun Mas was not yet ready and big enough to glut the ogre. She asked to Ijo for giving her another two years. The ogre agreed and left her house. Sirni was very sad because the ogre would someday take Timun Mas from her. The gods heard Sirni's sadness. They told both Sirni and Timun Mas to go to a mountain to meet a hermit. So, they went to the mountain and met the hermit. The hermit gave a small packet to Timun Mas. The packet contained of four essences: a cucumber seed, a needle, salt, and *terasi*, shrimp paste. The hermit gave instructions that Timun Mas would use the essences only if the ogre was about to take her away.

Then, it came the day Buto Ijo visited Sirni to collect the promise of giving Timun Mas to him. Knowing the ogre was coming to eat her, Timun Mas immediately ran away and the ogre chased her. After running and getting tired, Timun Mas used the first essence from the package, the cucumber seed. It sowed rapidly to a dense cucumber bush, bore with large cucumbers. The ogre paused the chase to eat the cucumber. Once his stomach is full, the ogre returned the chasing. This time he almost caught Timun Mas, but she had thrown the second essence, the needle, into the ground. It suddenly became a dense bamboo forest. The ogre was wounded, punctured by the bamboo rods. Nevertheless, he could pass the obstacle and continue to pursue Timun Mas. Knowing this, she immediately unwrapped the third essence, the salt, and there was a sea. The ogre for a moment sunk into the sea, but with his power he swam across that sea and went back in chasing Timun Mas. Eventually, Timun Mas had to use the last essence, shrimp paste (*terasi*). After she threw it there was a mud lake. Buto Ijo was shocked as his body submerged into

the mud lake. He thrashed in trying to save himself out from the mud. However, his efforts were futile. The ogre was dead as he was slowly sucked and sunk into the mud lake. Sirni was so relieved and happy to see Timun Mas returned home safely.

Satyana argued the Javanese created the folktale as an effort to illustrate and explain a precedent mudflow in the island and therefore it supports his argument that mudflows are common environmental features in Java. In all and any respect, relying on a folktale for historiography is baffling. Instead of clarifying some facts of the preexistence of the phenomena such an effort raises nothing but controversies. According to Nurcahyo, there are many versions of the folktale circulating in Java and not all mention about a mud lake in which the ogre sunk and died (Nurcahyo 2014).

There are some variants of how the ogre died drowned into the sea (from the salt) or tripped over a rock. Hence, the main structure of the folktale is not sending a particular message about natural disaster nor mudflows in Java. On the contrary, it is a manifest of people's imagination about the relationship between peasants and the profiteering economic system. It is a story of political struggle of Javanese peasants against the profiteering *ljon* system (from *ijo*, a Javanese word for "green"). The system is a traditional economy to provide peasants with high-interest loan, which they shall pay it with their upcoming harvest. According to some scholars, such a mechanism is detrimental to the poor peasants because they would be bonded with certain "moneylenders" (*pengijon*) (Partadireja 1974). The peasants could not sell their crops at a higher price to someone else as they have bonded in a preexisting

contract to sell the crops in order to pay their debts to particular moneylenders. This system has been long prevailing since many Javanese landless peasants (*buruh tani*) do not have sufficient cash in financing some unprecedented needs (especially, children education) and some other immediate expenses (especially, medication). Thus, instead of serving the poor, the system has become one crucial factor for the impoverishment of many Javanese peasants. For many years, the Indonesian government has been trying to stimulate the creation of microcredit through its banking system, but such does not seem to be succeeded in eliminating the system.

In the folktale, the *Ijon* system is manifested in the relation between Mbok Sirni (symbolizing a poor peasant) and Buto Ijo (symbolizing the system). Sirni has bonded herself to a profiteering contract with the ogre, of which says that she will give her future harvest in order to pay back the kindness of the ogre giving her a magical seed. Instead of obeying the agreement between Sirni and the ogre, Timun Mas chooses to struggle against the ogre. She does not wait for a messiah to come and rescue her, but rather search for some modalities that she can use to face the ogre. The story ends with Timun Mas's victorious defeating and killing the ogre. As we can see, the story is actually illustrating the triumph of the peasant (Sirni and Timun Mas) over the profiteering system (Buto Ijo) after having some modalities. (Later in the chapter, I will discuss how disaster victims adopt the narrative structure of the folktale to design the commemorations of the mudflow.) Thus, Satyana's effort to raise and reproduce the folktale has brought a new hope to people in facing an oppressive system on the ground that it depicts the dead of the notorious ogre

by drowned into an artificial mud lake. As such, the folktale has become a boomerang instead of affirmation of the “natural disaster” argument.

### **Actor of power**

Actors are subject to and the subjects of power and therefore I am very critical in investigating the contexts within which Satyana wrote the paper. At the time the paper was written, Satyana was working as a geologist at the Control Board of Oil and Gas Mining Activities (BPMigas). BPMigas was a governmental agency of which responsibility was granting private mining companies, including Lapindo, the permission to do oil and natural gas exploration in the country. Within such a context, Satyana’s paper is representing more or less the viewpoint of the government framing the mudflow in Porong as a natural event.

In previous chapters, I have critically discussed the position of the government within the incident and what would (and could) happen if the mudflow were officially declared as an industrial accident—triggered by Lapindo’s improper drilling of the Banjar Panji 1 well. It would not only affect Lapindo, the well operator, but also many government officials, including Satyana himself as BP Migas in-house geologist for the board authorized such a drilling. According to a report by the Indonesian Audit Board (BPK), BP Migas was proven to not examine the drilling plan of the controversial Banjar Panji 1 well as well as the other exploration wells in the Brantas Block. An examination to the drilling plan should have been done to ensure that it was designed in accordance to a good mining procedure and would not lead to any

catastrophic consequences. These facts are in contrast to the data presented in Satyana's paper.

By relying on the paper, BP Migas should have known from the beginning that the geology structure of the Brantas Block, where the Banjar Panji 1 well was located, is very conducive for a mudflow to emerge. Knowing this, instead of giving a special treatment, BP Migas allowed and permitted the drilling of exploration wells in the block without a strict technical supervision. What is more, in the course of the drilling, Lapindo never sent its daily reports to a governmental agency by way of a standard, regular mechanism in every oil and natural gas exploration activity in Indonesia as it is indicated in some governmental regulations (BPK 2007, 11–12). There was no government agency, including BP Migas itself, supervising the drilling or even demanded regular reports from the operator. The government had only received and examined the logbook just a few weeks after the mudflow erupted, which was done by the investigation team formed by the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources.

At first, the government relying on the report of the investigation team confirmed that the mudflow was a mining accident and it was manifested in a presidential decree concerning the formation of Timnas in September 2006. However, as of the issuance of a presidential regulation (No. 14 of 2007) in April 2007 marked a paradigm shift from mining accident management to spatial management (chapter 3), Satyana, speaking publicly in November 2007, was among government apparatuses to promote the discourse of “natural disaster.” His paper is therefore one among other efforts of government

officials in securing their position from the worst possibility that may occur following the mudflow.

The muddling historiography of Javanese mudflows proposed in the paper was intended to divert the discussion of the involvement of the government in the newborn, catastrophic mudflow in Porong, East Java. However, as the chapter will show, the paper has become a blunder for such a claim and “traditional” narratives, especially Timun Mas folktale, have become powerful tools for the empowerment of victims to be actors of the disaster.

#### **5.4. Javanese mythology of mudflow**

In any case, Satyana’s paper has opened subsequent researches of cultural narratives concerning mudflows in Java in a much more methodological fashion. I use the term “cultural narratives” in its position against “scientific explanations” discussed in chapter 4. Although such a definition will bring about controversy, it is to which my informants and interlocutors referring in distinguishing different rationalizations of the mudflow. Among others, one significant contribution of Satyana’s paper to the chapter is perhaps an idea that since mudflows are common environmental features in the island there should be some specific preexisting narratives about these phenomena in Javanese culture.

“Scientific explanations” have been very dominating in public spheres for science has been perceived to be the most valid way to explain the nature in a modern society (Latour 1993; 2004). In the course of the fieldwork I hardly found victim-informants who explained the incident in accordance to a

“mythical” interpretation. On exception was perhaps one Renokenongo villager I met in 2009 who interpreted that Lapindo had accidentally drilled the body of a sleeping serpent deep beneath the earth. According to him, the mudflow is the result of the angry serpent that has been awoken from its long sleep. According to my further inquiry, the Javanese mythology is indeed connecting mudflows with the existence of a giant serpent. In the following paragraphs, I am presenting Javanese mythology of mudflows. However, rather than to just reproduce and analyze them in the way of they are being structured (Lévi-Strauss 1963), I am more interested to address how the mythology has influenced victims’ commemorative practices of which will be the main discussion afterwards.

### **Two texts**

In the course of the fieldwork, I have collected two written sources telling about the myth of Bledug Kuwu mudflow in central Java. The first text is a book, entitled *Asal Mula Sumber Garam Kuwu* (the Origin of Salt Source in Kuwu; henceforth, “*Asal Mula*”), which I collected from the main library of the University of Indonesia, Depok (Sumarsih n.d.).<sup>41</sup> The book was published by Ditjen Kebudayaan, Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan (the Directorate of Culture, the Ministry of Education and Culture). The year of publication is not clear but since the book was part of the *Proyek Pengembangan Media Kebudayaan* (Media Development for Culture Project) I assume that it was published in the second half of the 1970s.

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<sup>41</sup> I thank to Ahmad Faisol and Mujtaba Hamdi at the Department of Anthropology, University of Indonesia for helping me to collect the book.

I was aware of the existence of the book from Denys Lombard's article, *Le Campa vu du sud* (Lombard 1987). In two footnotes of the article, Lombard mentions briefly the existence of "a salt source," which is apparently the well-known Bledug Kuwu in Kuwu district, Grobogan Regency. According to a colonial record, the salt from the mudflow has been very famous for the consumption of the Surakarta Palace (Goad 1817) and until the first half of the twentieth century there was massive salt production in some mudflows in Grobogan (Brown 1984). However, the salt production from these mudflows have been declining drastically as of the national politic changed rapidly in the aftermath of the 1965 coup in Indonesia (Haryatno 2012).

A second text, a photocopied book I collected from the caretaker of Bledug Kuwu in the course of a fieldtrip to the mudflow in June 2013.<sup>42</sup> The book entitled *Legenda Terjadinya Bledug Kuwu* (The Legend of Bledug Kuwu; henceforth, "*Legenda*") (Anonymous 1995). It does not indicate anything about any identity of the writer or the publisher and from the caretaker no valuable information about the originality of that material can be collected. The *Legenda* is written in a good EYD (*Ejaan yang Disempurnakan*, the Enhanced Indonesian Spelling System), almost no typo or misspelling and very easy to be understood. These facts lead to an assumption that the author must be a well educated, if not a schoolteacher. Although the identity of the writer and the authenticity of the content are in vague, the book is somehow very problematic as to it has been distributed to the visitors of Bledug Kuwu and therefore it has

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<sup>42</sup> The fieldtrip to Bledug Kuwu (and Bledug Kesanga) was part of Walhi Jatim (Friends of Earth, East Java) "Bengawan Solo Expedition" in June 2013. I would thank to all participants for this valuable expedition.

a very specific function: to provide people with cultural narratives about the origin of the mudflow.

### **Aji Saka, the savior of Java**

Relying on these sources, I learn that the *Bledug Kuwu* is associated with a mythological serpent, namely “Baruklinthing.” The serpent was the son of a Javanese legendary figure, Aji Saka, and since the mythology begins with his story I will summarize it as follows.<sup>43</sup>

Aji Saka (Javanese, meaning “valuable/sacred/magic pillar”) was a prince of India. Instead of succeeding his father as the next king, he wanted to explore the world and he began an adventure to the East accompanied by two companions, Dora and Sembada. They arrived first in Champa where Aji Saka married a princess. After the wedding, the three continued their journey to the island of Java and left the bride in Champa. Before arriving in Java, they landed on an island (believed to be the Madura Island). Aji Saka asked Sembada to stay on the island, while he and Dora continued the journey to Java. He entrusted Sembada to keep his heirloom creese (*keris pusaka*) and Sembada vowed to him that he would not leave the island and would keep the creese with his life and give to no one else, except Aji Saka himself.

Aji Saka and Dora continued the journey and landed on Java. At that time, Java was ruled by a kingdom, namely *Medang Kamulan* (Javanese, meaning “the confined outset”). Before arriving at the palace of Medang Kamulan, Aji Saka overnighted in a peasant’s house. From the peasant he learnt that the people of Medang Kamulan were living in unhappy because their notorious king Dewata Cengkar (Javanese, meaning “without understanding of God”) loved to eat human flesh. It was by coincidence the

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<sup>43</sup> The legend presented here is reproduced by tailoring both sources (*Asal Mula* and *Legenda*). I am very aware of the existence of other versions of the legend of Aji Saka. However, I noticed that the structure of the legend would not be much different.

king began to like eating human flesh. One day the palace chef cut and cooked his little finger. The king eventually ate it and he liked it. Since that day, the king was addicted to human flesh. Every day since, the troops were ordered to search for people to be served to the king. The peasant told Aji Saka that on the next day the troops would take his daughter as the king's next meal. He told the peasant not to worry because he would replace the daughter's position and promised that he would end the cruelty of the king.

The next morning, when the troops came to the house to take the peasant's daughter, Aji Saka offered himself to be taken by them. He was brought to the palace. When he met the king, Aji Saka asked a reward from the king a piece of land as wide as his headband. The land should be given to the peasant and he demanded the king's promise to no longer disturb the family. The king agreed. Aji Saka, then, stood in the palace front yard, held one side of his headband and Dewata Cengkar held the other side of the headband starting to measure the length of the headband himself. Surprisingly, the headband was longer than anyone ever expected, especially Dewata Cengkar. The headband continued to extend until the Southern Ocean. Dewata Cengkar was shocked. He fell and drowned to the sea and instantly transformed into a white crocodile. Knowing that Aji Saka has defeated their king, the people of Medang Kamulan were very happy. They crowned him as their new king replacing Dewata Cengkar.

After the coronation, Aji Saka recalled that he left his heirloom creese with Sembada. He sent Dora to pick up Sembada along with the creese to Medang Kamulan. Dora vowed to Aji Saka that he would not return to Medang Kamulan without bringing Sembada and the creese. Dora went to find Sembada and the two were reunited. Dora told Sembada everything that had happened with Aji Saka in Java and the intention of his coming. Unexpectedly, Sembada refused to leave the island either to give the creese to Dora. He insisted that he must keep his vow to Aji Saka: to guard the creese with his life and give it to no one except Aji Saka himself. Only

Aji Saka himself could undo the vow. Dora, on the contrary, insisted that he had made a vow that he would not return without bringing Sembada and the creese. Shortly, there was a quarrel between the two. The quarrel then turned into a physical fight. Because they both were equally strong, they died concurrently.

Aji Saka realizing belatedly of Sembada's vow tried to catch up with Dora. However, he was too late and found both of his companions died in a fierce battle in order to keep their vows to him. To commemorate his two loyal companions, Aji Saka wrote a story out of twenty letters:

හා    නා    ජා    රා    කා    දා    තා    සා    වා    ලා  
(ha   na   ca   ra   ka   da   ta   sa   wa   la)

("This is a story of two loyal companions")

පා    දා    ජා    යා    න්‍යා;    මා    ගා    බා    තා    න්‍යා  
(pa   da   ja   ya   nya;   ma   ga   ba   tha   nya)

("They were equally strong and robust; and died concurrently")

The narrative structure of Aji Saka legend is a different from the Javanese mythology of rice goddess, Dewi Sri (see 2.4). Whereas the myth of Dewi Sri is associated with the origin of agricultural lives, the legend of Aji Saka is more likely referring to the origin of political order in Java (cf. Pigeaud 1967, 153–154) as well as the advent of Islam and the rise of Islamic court in Java (Ricklefs 2001, 13–14). Therefore, whereas Dewi Sri guides the relation between humans and nature, Aji Saka gives directions of how humans interrelate each other. The legend emphasizes the important role of a newcomer, foreigner to the Javanese since Aji Saka is not only a person who

defeats the notorious Dewata Cengkar, but rather a messiah who saves the people from the evil king (Priest 1995).

Many scholars have argued that Aji Saka is to be more a fictional rather than a historical figure (e.g., Lombard 1987; Ricklefs 2001). The Aji Saka mythology and its variants were written in the early development of Islamic courts in Java (Pigeaud 1967) and they tell specifically about the civilizing of Java, e.g., the introduction of literacy (Lombard 1987) and religion (Ricklefs 2001) into the Javanese. The “Aji Saka alphabet” is indeed one of many evidence of Indianization of Java for it is a simplified form of Sanskrit and was invented after the Kawi (Old Javanese) alphabet (Robson 2011). Currently, the Javanese recognize these twenty letters as Aksara Jawa (the Javanese alphabets). In some cities in central Java, such as Yogyakarta and Surakarta (Solo), people can find these alphabets on street name signs, in addition to the Latin alphabets. Indeed, in many elementary schools in the central and east Java, in which writing using these alphabets is one competence for the pupils to master, the legend of Aji Saka is very popular. Before teaching the pupils how to write using the alphabet, teachers would tell the legend of the invention of the alphabets they about to learn and the meaning behind them.<sup>44</sup> However, it is perhaps due to the reproduction of the story has been focusing only on the advent of Aji Saka as the savior of Java by defeating the notorious king Dewata

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<sup>44</sup> The legend of Aji Saka is not the only story about the origin of the Javanese alphabet. There is, for instance, the legend of *Empu Sangkaadi*, who embraced Islam and became a companion of the Prophet Mohammad. *Empu Sangkaadi* was the one who introduced the alphabets as well as Islam to the Javanese (Robson 2011). East Javanese scholar Ayu Sutarto also mentions some other legends about the origin and meaning of the alphabets circulating in East Java, yet the structure of those narratives is quite similar the introduction of the alphabets and Islam (Sutarto 2006).

Cengkar until the invention of the Javanese alphabets, not many Javanese would ever heard the story of Aji Saka's son, Naga Baruklinthing.

### **Naga Baruklinthing**

Relying on my reading of both *Asal Mula* and *Legenda*, I noted an ambiguity about the origin of Naga Baruklinthing (*naga*, Javanese meaning “serpent”; *baruklinthing*, Javanese meaning “newly-flaked”). In *Asal Mula*, it is told that Baruklinthing was born from the peasant's daughter whose home was overnighted by Aji Saka during the journey to the Medang Kamulan palace. It is divulged on the night Aji Saka stayed she borrowed his knife, which accidentally fell on her lap, and this made her pregnant with a serpent. Differently, *Legenda* tells that Baruklinthing was originated from an egg of a rooster after it drunk Aji Saka's urine. It is also told that both Aji Saka and the girl, namely Rara Cangkek, had a feeling for each other but none of them ever expressed the feeling. After the troops took Aji Saka to the palace to replace her position as the king's meal, she found the egg, kept it and hatched it in a rice barn. She was surprised to find a serpent in the barn she hatched the egg. Instead of disposing it, she brought it up as her own child and named it Baruklinthing.

Baruklinthing is however the main figure in the legend of Bledug Kuwu in both *Asal Mula* and *Legenda*. The legend can be summarized as follows:<sup>45</sup>

One day, Baruklinthing came to the Medang Kamulan palace with a strong intention to meet the king, Aji Saka. He wanted to ask for recognition as the king's child. Aji Saka was surprised to know that he had a child of a serpent. However, he did not necessarily reject the request. On the

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<sup>45</sup> The story reproduced here is tailored from *Asal Mula* and *Legenda*.

contrary, he would admit Baruklinthing as his son only if Baruklinthing could kill the white crocodile of the Southern Ocean, of which was the incarnation of his mortal enemy, Dewata Cengkar. Baruklinthing has to cut the crocodile's head and bring it back to Medang Kamulan.

Inwardly, Aji Saka assumed that the task was impossible for Baruklinthing to accomplish. He was pretty sure that Baruklinthing would not be able to kill the crocodile. Instead, he expected the opposite that the crocodile would defeat and kill Baruklinthing. In other word, the task to kill the crocodile is a subtle way for him to reject Baruklinthing from becoming his son and so that he can be free from the shame of having a child of a serpent. Baruklinthing accepted the challenge and began his underground journey to the Southern Ocean to battle the white crocodile of Dewata Cengkar. The battle took days, weeks. Unexpectedly, Baruklinthing succeeded in killing the crocodile and aimed to return to Medang Kamulan with bringing its head.

Baruklinthing, who were traveling underground in fatigue after having a long battle against Dewata Cengkar, had to surface for several times to take a rest. The spots where Baruklinthing surfaced turned into *bledugs* (mud eruptions).<sup>46</sup> Up at a time when Baruklinthing was so tired, he surfaced in the Kuwu region and transformed into an ugly boy. An old man tried to help and asked for his name but he could not remember anything else except that he was in a journey to Medang Kamulan to meet Aji Saka. The old man, then, named him Jaka Linglung (Javanese, meaning "dazed man"). After resting for a while, Linglung transformed again into his original serpent form and entered the spot to continue the journey. The spot in where

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<sup>46</sup> In some other Javanese literatures they are mentioning the existence of Naga Linglung or Baruklinthing as a key figure for the origin of some other lakes in Java (see Pigeaud 1968, 62, 481, 484, 506). A similar plot of a girl impregnation with a serpent after she accidentally dropped a knife into her lap, for instance, is in evidence in the structure of the legend of Lake Grati in Pasuruan and of Lake Ngebel in Ponorogo—both lakes are located in east Java. In these areas, the name of the legendary serpent is also Baruklinthing. Notably, there is one folktale of a serpent which was transformed into an ugly boy, who was named Baruklinthing, and created the lake of Rawa Pening in Ambarawa, central Java (Pigeaud 1968, 358).

Baruklinthing surfaced and transformed into Jaka Linglung is now known as the Bledug Kuwu.

*Asal Mula* ends with the story of Baruklinthing realizing that the task to kill the white crocodile of Dewata Cengkar was just a ploy to get rid of him. Therefore, instead of continuing his journey to Medang Kamulan, he went to other place and vanished. *Legenda*, contrariwise, has a different, longer plot for the ending of the legend.

After transforming back to the original form, a serpent, Baruklinthing continued the journey to the Medang Kamulan palace to meet Aji Saka. The king finally admitted Baruklinthing as his son and permitted him residing the palace. Yet, Baruklinthing found himself uncomfortable with royal life, especially with the food. He began to eat some domestic pets in the palace one by one. Knowing this, the palace guards reported to Aji Saka about this uncanny habit of Baruklinthing. The king was very angry and sent Baruklinthing in an exile at the Kesanga Forest as the punishment. In addition to the exile, Baruklinthing should never hunt for his meals and only eat the food which was voluntarily given to him.

The condition went on for some time. Up to one day, a group of ten boys was playing around the forest and had to find a cave to shelter from a sudden heavy rain. Nine of the ten boys ensconced in the cave and forbade a boy from entering the cave because his body's odor. After the rain stopped, the boy, who stayed outside the cave, could not find his friends. Instead, he discovered a giant serpent with a bloodied mouth. It turned out that the cave was the mouth of Baruklinthing and the other boys who sheltered from the rain were eaten by it. The boy ran home bringing this bad news to the villagers.

The villagers, then, reported the incident to their king, Aji Saka. The king was getting angrier with Baruklinthing. This time, he told the mother Rara

Cangkek to punish the serpent herself. With the help from her father, Cangkek, who was very fond of it, nailed it to the ground with pegs along his body from head to tail so that he could not move. Baruklinthing finally died in that forest and in the place where he died there is another *bledug*, which is currently called Bledug Kesanga (Javanese, meaning “the ninth eruption”).

It seems to me that *Legenda* does not aim to merely describe the origin of Bledug Kuwu, but rather to promote some other mudflows in Grobogan, especially Bledug Kesanga, to tourists visiting the popular Bledug Kuwu. This strong intention is very visible in the endnote of *Legenda*, of which reads, “visitors who have witnessed Bledug Kuwu would be incomplete without visiting the earth of Kesanga.”

Bledug Kesanga is located c. 15 km eastern of Bledug Kuwu. Its crater occupies an area of c. 200 ha (for comparators, Bledug Kuwu is c. 50 ha and the artificial mud lake in Porong spreads out an area of more than 800 ha). It is located up on a hill and inaccessible to a four-wheel vehicle. One has to walk more than an hour from the nearest hamlet. A wide, dry savanna surrounds it and one hardly finds wet paddies nearby (Fig. 5.2). Instead of showing highly, massive mud eruptions, Bledug Kesanga shows a similar characteristic with Kalang Anyar mudflow in Sedati, Sidoarjo (see 2.4) with only small streams of mud flowing from several spots and unclear where the main vent is.



*Fig. 5.1 Bledug Kuwu (Photo courtesy of Lutfi Amiruddin, 2013)*



*Fig. 5.2 Bledug Kesanga (Photo courtesy of Lutfi Amiruddin, 2013)*

### **Javanese mudflows**

Apart from the problem with the fictional figure of Aji Saka, historians have long debated about the existence of the Medang Kamulan Kingdom owing to the lack of historical and archaeological evidence (Soekmono 1958; 1967; Rahardjo 2011). Whereas some historians and archaeologists say that the kingdom is nothing but a fictional estate, laypeople believe that it had been there. But, instead of addressing the debate, I am more interested in focusing on how Javanese mythology of mudflows are structured and how the structure of the mythology might cohere with the process of constructing collective memories of the victims of the newborn in Porong.

The main idea of the Aji Saka legend is the role of a newcomer, foreigner to civilize, educate people in Java—not to conquer, as the colonizers to their colonies. The legend is part of a broader Javanese mythology regarding the advent of Islam and the rise of Islamic court in Java. Therefore, the narrative structure of the legend complies with the structure of the mythology, of which contains three prominent points: 1) the early preachers were foreigners; 2) in due course they performed some magical events; and 3) the conversion to Islam started from with the court centers (Ricklefs 2001, 13–14). As we can see, all these themes are in evidence in the structure of the legend of Aji Saka. It is told that Aji Saka was a foreigner traveling to Java, he had performed some magical events (killing the notorious king with his headband), and he became a king first before starting the teaching. Christian theologian Douglas Priest, intriguingly, compares the legend with the Christian Holy Bible and argues that the Aji Saka figure is an indication of the idea of messianism in

Javanese culture (Priest 1995). The structure of the mythologies—the advent of Aji Saka to salvage the people from their notorious political regimes—complies perfectly with the idea of the advent of Christ to salvage the world (Priest 1995, 238–240). Of course, comparing Aji Saka with Christ is very problematic, yet the logic of a messiah, a savior to come and salvage the people has been the main structure of both the legend and the Bible. Both figures were playing vital role in bringing their people to a more “civilized stage” of human life.

The legend of Bledug Kuwu is an unequivocal interpretation that mudflows are not entirely natural. It can be interpreted from the existence of a chthonic being, a male serpent of Baruklinthing, throughout the legend. According to Dutch anthropologist Robert Wessing, in Southeast Asia a serpent symbolizes the impureness of being (Wessing 2006). It is usually a creature of which form is a hybrid, a mixture of human and snake. It is imperfect in being either human or snake, but it can live in two different worlds, the underworld and the earth. Perhaps, the most popular serpent in Javanese literatures is *Nyai Rara Kidul*, who has been discussed widely by various scholars (e.g., Jordaan 1984; Wessing and Jordaan 1997; Wessing 2007). *Nyai Rara Kidul* is a female serpent, the queen of the Southern Ocean, and perhaps has been the most important and sacred being in Javanese mythology. It is told that the kings of Islamic courts in Java are considered by way of married to this female serpent so that they could gain the power over their subjects.

Contrariwise, the legend of Bledug Kuwu mentions the existence of a male serpent, the unwanted child of the king. Whereas most female serpents are perceived as the genesis of live (see Wessing 2006; 2007), Baruklinthing is

perceived as the source of misfortunes or even deaths. There are some Javanese mythologies mentioning the relation of Nyai Rara Kidul and Naga Baruklinthing/Linglung. In one myth, it is told that Nyai Rara Kidul has a suitor of a serpent too, namely Naga Linglung. In *Serat Kanda*, a version of *Babad Tanah Jawi*, it is told that after he defeated the white crocodile, Naga Linglung/Baruklinthing married to Retna Blorong, Nyai Rara Kidul's daughter. Only after that, he began his return journey to Medang Kamulan, in due course he popped up and made some lakes (Pigeaud 1968, 484).

By saying that mudflows (or any other environmental features) are originated from a serpent, it could be interpreted that both humans and the nature have contributed significantly in triggering these features. In other word, the cause of mudflows is never entirely natural for humans, or at least humanlike creatures, contribute to such phenomena to exist. In the Javanese culture, this idea does not only work for mudflows but also other environmental features, such as mountains, lakes, rivers, straits, and many more. It seems to me that the Javanese always perceived their environments in a context that their existence and dynamics are never detached from human activities. Up at this point, I am quite amazed by the fact that I could not find any scientific, modern explanation presented in a geologic paper proposing the possibility of the newborn mudflow in Porong as hybrid, as per one result of the conference in Cape Town, in October 2008. The dispute of the geologists over the mudflow in scientific forums has been circulating around whether the mudflow was triggered entirely by human (drilling) or purely by natural (earthquake) (see 4.5). None is continuing to seek for the possibility of a "hybrid" mudflow, that is

to say that the mudflow is resulted from the combination of both the drilling and the earthquake.

### **5.5. Expecting the coming of a savior**

The legend of Baruklinthing is structured in a plot of a boy searching for recognition from his father the king, which parallels the legend of Arya Damar shared around the Kalang Anyar mudflow in Sedati, Sidoarjo (see 2.4). Apparently, the noble king does not really expect to have a child from a non-royal member. He sought to get rid of the child in a subtle way by giving him a dangerous task. He assumes that the task is too difficult for the child to accomplish. Surprisingly, the child successfully consummates the task. From here, the storyline is running to different directions. One version of the story ends with a late cognizance of the child realizing that his father, the king, does not want him and the child deliberately chooses to vanish, as in the case of Arya Damar, and Baruklinthing in *Asal Mula*. Another storyline continues with the king's recognition of this imperfect being as his child, as in the case of Baruklinthing in *Legenda*. Nonetheless, living in accordance to a royal life is a very different experience for the child and therefore he violates some principles. The king, without hesitation, gives punishment for those who dishonor the regulations, even if that person is his own child.

The symbol of a serpent appeared in Porong in the course of the four-year commemoration of the mudflow in 2010. That year the victims made three giant puppets made from bamboos and papers: an effigy of Aburizal's head, Lapindo octopus (symbolizing the complexity of Lapindo's networks) and a red

serpent (the guardian of the underworld). Along the body of the serpent, there was writing: "Prosecute Lapindo, criminal against humanity and environment. Lapindo victims, unite, to end this struggle." On May 29, 2010, the victims paraded those puppets. It was theatrically performed the serpent attacked "Lapindo" and "Aburizal Bakrie" and escorted them into the mud lake.

In Indonesia, environmental hazards have become distinct discursive fields for the citizens to criticize the government (Lapian 1987; Schlehe 2009) of which is also happening in the course of the mudflow in Porong. Disaster victims believe that Lapindo's drilling is the main cause of the mudflow eruption. The more Lapindo denies it and the more the government is trying to shield Lapindo, the more people believe that there was something wrong with the drilling. The main concern is no longer with the mudflow as a catastrophic environmental feature, but rather the vagueness of the government in upholding the justice and the imbecility of Lapindo spreading the lie to the publics.

The theatrical performance of the four-year anniversary signs how disaster victims were adjuring a decisive ruler, the government, to come and solve the mess that Lapindo has made. This did not mean that the victims succumbed to the situation. They had been trying as tough as possible in bargaining with Lapindo, but instead of showing a good will in resolving the victims' sufferings it has been trying to ignore them. They, then, need a more powerful figure, in this case the government dealing with the company in order to end the perils. But, as I already presented in previous chapters, to expect the government standing in the position against the company is something impossible. One key

reason has been the fact that both institutions have a common interest in protecting their positions from any legal consequences that may occur if the mudflow is proven caused by industrial accidents.

The idea of expecting and waiting for the government or other powerful figures to resolve victims' problems does not suit to their real conditions. The victims are therefore searching for other cultural narratives, which may fit to explain what is happening with them.

### **5.6. The evil spirit of "Aburizal Bakrie"**

In Indonesia, there is a typical view that interprets environmental disasters as not merely natural but rather cultural. The idea is to view natural hazards as the result of individual or collective misconducts (Lapian 1987). A recent study of the cultural interpretation toward volcanic eruptions of Mount Merapi in Central Java discovered that some people interpreted the hazards as the outcome of the power abuse of their rulers, either in local or national level (Schlehe 2009). Environmental hazards occur to balance the disharmonious relationship between human and nature and among humans. Thus, natural hazards are interpreted to be cultural in the sense that they are the result of some inappropriate manners of some humans to other humans/non-humans (Schlehe 2009, 277).

In particular, the East Javanese view misfortunes, including natural hazards as a result of evil spirits possessing the communities (Wessing 2010). Such an understanding relies on a principle that human bodies are understood as containers for spirits. "The problem," Wessing observes, "is that these

containers are thought to be porous, allowing spirits and other influences to move in and out, and leaving the person involved open to a loss of personal spirit or to possession, the invasion of the body by an alien spirit” (Wessing 2010, 53). To prevent the original spirits from coming out of the bodies and therefore alien spirits would not be able to come in to the bodies some rituals should be performed. The main idea is to protect the human bodies and the spirits that dwell in them. In East Java, if a misfortune had happened there are other rituals to cast out these alien spirits and restore the original spirits back to their bodies. These rituals are called *ruwatan* (exorcism) and it has been manifested in the 2012 and 2013 commemorations of the mudflow. Yet, this idea would not appear if an idea of an alien spirit has plagued the society has never existed before.

This idea complies with what the mudflow victims believe; in their case, the misbehaved actor in the course of the mudflow is Aburizal Bakrie. As discussed in other chapters, at the time of the mudflow erupted Aburizal was acting simultaneously as an active minister at the cabinet and at once is the leading figure of Lapindo’s parent company, the Bakries. Currently, Aburizal is chairperson of Golkar Party and this position has become critical for him because the victims frame him not only as the “bad guy” but even more as the “evil spirit” possessing both the society and the government. Within this context, Aburizal has been the main target of mudflow victims’ anger in the course of various commemorative practices.

Among many, I found that the most noticeable commemorative media to permeate the idea of Aburizal Bakrie as an evil spirit were *wayang karduses*

which literally means “cardboard puppets,” yet they were actually more likely paintings, sometimes sentences were added, on the media of used-cardboard (*kardus*). The paintings functioned both as banners for the parade of disaster commemorations. They served as the media for victims expressing their concerns about the disaster of which sometimes contradicting with and challenging the official statements from the government or the company. But what is the most important for this study is the fact that these paintings represent how the victims interpret the disaster they experience.

### **Cardboard paintings**

Some paintings were representing victims’ imaginations colored with emotions, feelings and interpretations about the disaster and the impacts on their village, their lives and their future. Some paintings depict the impacts of the mudflow on the environment, such as fishes in the river, plants, paddy fields, houses, and many more. That disaster brings nothing but destruction appears to be one key theme of many paintings. It is a common for disaster victims delivering the message of obliterations in the disaster aftermath. However, what is more interested for this study to argue is the fact that the mudflow victims are seeing what happens to them less as an environmental disaster than as a political tragedy.

The theme of political tragedy appears in some paintings. One painting, for instance, illustrates the sinking of the Garuda (the emblem of Indonesia) into the mud lake. The Garuda was not sinking because of environmental cause (the mudflow) but rather “greediness” (*karna keserakahan*) (Fig. 5.3). It tries to

relate the disaster to a larger issue of nationalism. The impacts of the mudflow not only threaten the people and the environment of Porong but also reach out to the nation.



*Fig. 5.3 The sink of Garuda into the mud (Photo courtesy of Anton Novenanto, 2012)*



Fig. 5.4 The mud destroyed my village (Photo courtesy of Baswara Yua, 2013)



Fig. 5.5 The Bakries and mudflow (Photo courtesy of Anton Novenanto, 2012)

Still related to the political tragedy, there are other paintings framing development and a corrupt government as the source of their crises. One remarkable example is one painting of the symbol of development, excavator destroying the village, and a sentence “My village is destroyed by mud.” The scene shows the ambiguity whether the village was destroyed by the mudflow, by the excavator (development) or by both factors (Fig. 5.4). Another painting was full of sentences attempting to explain a collusive relation between the Bakries and the government in the course of the disaster (Fig. 5.5). The sentences themselves can be divided into two sections. The first section is describing the mudflow impact to the societies in Porong and the second section is responding to the government decision to use the state budget to recompense the damages resulted from the mudflow, instead of obliging Lapindo to do so. What is more, they accuse the Bakries for stealing the treasure trove of their homeland.

From these paintings, the victims are attempting to articulate how they identify themselves as victims of an environmental hazard (the mudflow) and of a corrupted politics. They perceive themselves as the politically oppressed and therefore they want to be free from such a situation. The idea, which has been vastly growing, exists in collective memories of the victims. To identify the mudflow as a political tragedy has been a focal discourse shaped the victims and articulated in some paintings. As of the court decided for the release of all lawsuits against Lapindo and awkwardly declared the mudflow as “natural disaster,” an understanding of a corrupt trial on the Lapindo case has developed among the victims. It was clearly shown in one painting with a

reading: “When the victims of Lapindo seeking for justice, the law and justice have been purchased.” It seems to me that disaster victims have a special concern to the issue of corruption, marked the existence of rats as the symbol of corruption in some paintings. One painting vulgarly illustrates the parliament building as the rats’ nest, while other painting pictures the rats are playing on the Indonesian national flag. There are other paintings designating the existence of corruption in the country, especially in the Indonesian parliament. Another painting depicts rats eating the Garuda of which scene tries to tell us that corruption is a serious threat to nationalism.

The theme of corruption in relation to the Lapindo case has become clearer in some other paintings, which are illustrating a corrupt figure of Aburizal Bakrie. Sometimes it is written only as “Bakrie,” but some paintings use “ARB,” the acronym for Abu Rizal Bakrie, which is a rather new term to replace Aburizal’s original nickname “Ical” for the purpose of his presidential candidate for the 2014 election since in Javanese *ical* means “gone” or “missing” and this kind of meaning is perceived to be unfavorable for his popularity among the Javanese voters. I noted some mudflow victims spoofed the acronym into *Aku Raja Bohong* (I’m the king of lies) or *Asal Ra Bakrie* (as long as not Bakrie [is the president]) in some paintings. One painting, for example, portrayed a rat with the head of Aburizal, to say bluntly that Aburizal is a corruptor. The painting came with a reading, *ARB rakus, hidup rakyat hangus* (ARB’s greediness, people’s live burned). Another painting of “piggy bank” came with a reading: *Bakrie babi nyolong duit rakyat* (Bakrie pig has stolen money from the people).

From these paintings, one could instantly sense the rage of the victims against one figure only, Aburizal Bakrie. Even more, Aburizal's plan to run for a president candidate has been one main subject in some other paintings, with which the victims were addressing a serious moral question owing to the fact that one of his company, Lapindo, has yet to complete its obligation to many victims (chapter 2) and is trying to escape from all the problems of the mudflow. Consequently, according to them, Aburizal is dreamy to be the next Indonesian president. I noticed that some paintings came with satirical readings: *Awas, jangan pilih aku karena Aku Raja Bohong* (Beware, don't choose me because I'm the king of lies), *Pilih aku, pasti tertipu* (Vote me [and you will be] fooled), or *Raimu kakean dosa, ora iso dadi presiden* (Your look is full of sins [and therefore you] could not be a president).

That Aburizal is the main target for the mudflow victims' angriness is clearly visible in many of the paintings, however I noticed one painting to be the most sarcastic among others. It depicts the head of Aburizal is stabbed with a knife from his left forehead to his right cheek (Fig. 5.6). It includes two lines written in Arabic. The top line reads:

أبو رجل بكر موته خير من حياته

(Aburizal Bakrie mautuhū khairun min ḥayātihī)

And the bottom line reads:

خير الناس أنفعهم للناس

(khairu 'n-nāsi 'anfa'uhum li 'n-nās)

The first sentence can be translate as “Aburizal Bakrie’s death is better than his life” and the latter, which was quoted from one hadith of the Prophet Muhammad, “a good person is the most beneficial for others.”<sup>47</sup>



Fig. 5.6 Aburizal’s death is better than his life (Photo courtesy of Anton Novenanto, 2012)

### Reclaiming *Timun Mas*

According to Cak Irsyad, the founder and leader of *Sanggar Alfaz*, the painting symbolizes that the rage of the victims to Aburizal has reached to “the god level” (*marah tingkat dewa*) (personal communication, May 27, 2012). The idea of the victims identifying themselves as the angry gods has allowed them to act as if they were the gods and for this reason they think they can do

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<sup>47</sup> I am indebted to Munir Ikhwan for the translation and transliteration of these sentences.

anything. And, as to them there has been no beneficial of the live of Aburizal, it is better for them to take his live rather than to let him live and torment more people. Such an idea complies with the structure of the Timun Mas folktale, especially in the fragment of the notorious ogre is eventually killed by the oppressed peasant. As discussed earlier in 5.3, the appearance of Timun Mas folktale as a tool to interpret the mudflow has brought a new hope to the victims as for the folktale is telling about how an oppressed peasant facing an profiteering economic system. The folktale symbolizes the system as a green ogre (*Buto Ijo*) and as the ending it drown into an artificial mud lake and died. In a section above, I have briefly discussed how the folktale can be related to the production of knowledge about the mudflow. In the following paragraph, I intend to address how the meaning of the folktale has changed drastically to become one propounding statement for the victims to commemorate the mudflow as an anthropogenic disaster.

In October 2012, I involved in an intensive email-based discussion with some activists in planning the seven-year commemoration of the eruption in May 2013. Apparently, the discussion had been running before one of the discussant invited me to participate in it. At that time, the activists proposed a very nice, rich theme, which was “underground memories” (*memori bawah tanah*). The idea was in the seven-year commemoration would be a moment for the victims to present their memories about their submerged homes and their struggles in coping with social and ecological crises resulted from the mudflow. Meddling in that warm discussion, I proposed an idea to reproduce the Timun Mas folktale into a theatrical performance in the commemoration. I

argue that the main idea of the folktale is not a story of natural disaster (mudflow) but it had become an effective means of the camp. Based on such an understanding, I argue in the discussion, there should be an effort to deconstruct the structure of narrative of the folktale. Unfortunately, the idea received a resistance from one activist who tried to remind me that, by any means, the publics would interpret the reproduction of the folktale as a support to the natural disaster claim. I felt that at the time there was a strong public opinion that instead of power-free the folktale has been politicized; yet, it belongs only to the natural disaster camp. However, from time to time, I observed that there has been a changing viewpoint of the activists in defining and positioning the folktale in the incident.

According to a local environmentalist-cum-journalist Henri Nurcahyo, there are many variants of the Timun Mas folktale circulating in Java and not all mentioning about a mudflow or mud lake (Nurcahyo 2014). Yet, their narrative structure is similar, there are other versions of the death of the ogre, such as drowned into the sea (from the salt) or tripped over a rock. By this, Nurcahyo wanted to say that the using of the folktale to claim natural disaster over the newborn mudflow in Porong is nothing but a manipulation of, if not an insult to, the Javanese culture. And this sort of thing, according to him, should not be continuing and for this reason he wrote and published a book entitled *Rekayasa Dongeng dalam Bencana Lumpur Lapindo* (Engineering Folktale in the Lapindo Mudflow Disaster). The main argument proposed in the book, which he has been struggling since 2011, is how the folktale is being used in power struggles over the Lapindo case to claim that the mudflow is just a mere

natural phenomena. He is referring to Awang Harun Satyana (see 5.3) and such an effort, according to him, was a misnomer for it was done by a geologist, who ideally should construct arguments based on scientific data, instead of fairy tales.

The book focuses not on the search for the truth behind the folktale but rather on how it serves as a discourse. To Nurcahyo, every folktale contains a moral story that can be extracted by searching for meanings of each appeared symbol. According to him, the Timun Mas folktale is a story of the relation between the state (represented by the ogre) and the citizens (represented by Timun Mas and her foster mother) (Nurcahyo 2014, 43–47).<sup>48</sup> There are two messages to be delivered from the folktale. First, it is a message to the government to not too arbitrary in dealing with the citizens. A second message is to the citizens for not easily giving up to severe conditions.

Apart from the content, the book suggests culture as another discursive field for power competitions of the mudflow disaster. It begins with an effort of a geologist using a cultural feature, i.e., folktale, as a tool to promote the natural disaster claim. Nurcahyo proposes a way to reconstruct, or to be more precisely to deconstruct, meanings given to the folktale as a justification of the claim. He argues that the folktale is not a property of the natural disaster camp and therefore suggests that it can be utilized by anyone, especially disaster victims in interpreting the mudflow. It is clearly written in the dedication page of

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<sup>48</sup> Slightly different, Nilawaty interprets the relationship between Timun Mas and Buto Ijo by analogy with the unequal power relation between the mudflow children victims and Lapindo (Nilawaty 2012).

the book: “Dedicated for ‘the Timun Mas,’ who are always in patience until ‘the Ogre’ [will] drown in the sea of mud.”<sup>49</sup>

In the course of the fieldwork, I noted how victims reclaiming the folktale as their tool to be resistant to the natural disaster camp. What is more, the folktale clearly illustrates the dead of a notorious ogre drowned into an artificial mud lake and the illustration matches perfectly with the idea to cleanse the community of the alien, evil spirit. And it was the reason of the victims made an effigy of Aburizal Bakrie to commemorate the mudflow and the occurring disaster as a medium of the exorcism. This brings us back to the description of the procession of drowning Aburizal in effigy presented at the outset of this study (see 1.1).

### **An effigy of Aburizal Bakrie**

In preparing the seven-year anniversary of the eruption, the victims came out with an idea to make an *ogoh-ogoh* (the local name for “effigy”) of Aburizal Bakrie for the commemorative performance. The *ogoh-ogoh* was the focal object in the 2013 anniversary of the mudflow, in which the victims paraded “Aburizal Bakrie” from Porong square, *alun-alun*, coming through the Porong highway to the west side of the mud embankment. The climax of the commemoration was the throwing of Aburizal Bakrie in effigy into the mud lake. Subsequent to the procession, Irsyad started to pelt the *ogoh-ogoh* with mud, which was followed by some other victims.

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<sup>49</sup> “Dipersembahkan kepada para Timun Mas yang selalu bersabar sampai dengan Raksasa tenggelam dalam lautan lumpur.”

According to Irsyad, the idea of making the effigy was inspired by a Balinese ritual, which is a specific theatrical performance a few days ahead of *Nyepi* (the first day of the Balinese New Year). The ritual, according to Irsyad, aims to cleanse the communities of evil spirits when they enter a new year. Nowadays, in addition to make effigies of mythological creatures (ogres or demons), the Balinese also creatively create some figures of the real life, which are deemed to be giving bad influences for the life of the communities. The climax of the procession is to burn down the effigies into ashes as a symbol of the cleansing the village of evil spirits and bad lucks. Adopting such an idea, the mudflow victims led by Irsyad made an effigy of Aburizal Bakrie since they saw him is the “evil spirit” who has brought nothing but miseries and sufferings to the people in Porong. They aimed to exorcize the evil spirit of Aburizal from the society. However, instead of burning the effigy to ashes, as the Balinese do, the mudflow victims drown Aburizal in effigy into the mud lake paralleling to what Timun Mas does to Buto Ijo.

As we can see, the commemorative practices of drowning Aburizal in effigy emerge from a very discursive process—the victims felt they could no longer expect the presence of an assertive leader to resolve their problems with Lapindo, there has been a demonization of Aburizal’s figure from only a “bad guy” to an “evil spirit,” and simultaneously the narrative structure of the Timun Mas folktale gives a concrete visualization of how the evil died by drowned into an artificial mud lake. The narrative structure of the folktale has been increasingly influencing collective consciousness of the mudflow victims. Focusing on the sinking of the ogre into the mud lake, more victims and other

publics are utilizing and reproducing this idea in various commemorative practices of the mudflow. The victims adopted the folktale for its narrative structure offering hope for them and allow them to act directly—instead of waiting for a messiah to come, like the legend of Aji Saka and Baruklinthing offers. Although the narrative structure of the legend offers the same idea that mudflows are not purely natural phenomena, it focuses on the role of a centralized power into a king, Aji Saka, which is a typical idea of power circulating in the Javanese culture (B. Anderson 2007).

The idea of the advent of a messiah to salvage the Javanese is just a legitimization for the rising Islamic courts in Java and how the kings of these courts are believed to be the messiah for these people. Following such an idea, freedom, then, does not come from people's struggle but rather from the goodwill of the rulers and this is quite the opposite of what is happening in Porong. The government was never standing for the mudflow victims. Instead, the government has been shielding Lapindo and the Bakries by reducing their responsibilities and excluding them from the obligations to perform disaster mitigation. Instead, the government is willing to take over Lapindo's liabilities to deal with further damages resulted from the mudflow (see 3.5). To expect a political will from the government to resolve the Lapindo case is nothing but wasting time because, according to the victims, an evil spirit has possessed it and they must cast out that spirit themselves.

In this context, the Timun Mas folktale provides a perfect narrative structure suggesting that ordinary people can become very powerful to face and defeat their oppressors if only they could get appropriate modalities to

fight. The concentration of the protagonist in the character of a peasant, Timun Mas, instead of a ruling king, such as Aji Saka, is something that evokes solidarities within the mudflow victims. It is like the folktale recommending the victims to articulate a single message: “We, victims, can solve this problem alone without the need to expect of a savior to come.”

Nonetheless, the interpretation of the Timun Mas folktale has become uncontrollable. In the eight-year commemoration, for instance, the mudflow commemoration was shaped within the context of the 2014 legislative and presidential elections and intended as a black campaign for Golkar and Aburizal. The logo for the 2014 commemoration widely circulated in the Internet and many people (mostly victims and activists) put it as their *Facebook* or *Twitter* profile pictures. The logo illustrates the picture of Aburizal Bakrie framed by a figure of number eight and comes along with it is a reading: “It’s the time to drown the ogre of Lapindo mudflow” (Fig. 5.7). However, according to my victim-informants, the 2014 commemoration is nothing but a political campaign of one presidential candidate, then Indonesia’s new president (2014-2019), Joko Widodo. The atmosphere of the year commemoration is as if Joko Widodo is a *ratu adil* (savior/messiah) to take down Aburizal from the nation’s political arena. This subsequent interpretation somehow contradicts to the previous processes of interpreting the mudflow disaster.



Fig. 5.7 The logo for the eight-year commemoration of the mudflow (Courtesy of Gugun Muhammad, 2014)

### 5.7. A monument of tragedy

Along with the making of an effigy of Aburizal Bakrie for the seven-year commemoration, the victims made a small monument of “Lapindo mudflow tragedy” and prior to the drowning of the effigy of Aburizal (on May 29, 2013) they erected it on the top of the embankment (Fig. 5.8). The idea of making the monument was something anew in the course of the Lapindo case for the most common practice for every commemoration has been throwing certain materials and objects, including the effigy, into the mud. The writing on the monument, which is more likely a tombstone, reads:

Monument of Lapindo Mudflow Tragedy	<i>Monumen Tragedi Lumpur Lapindo</i>
The Lapindo mudflow has buried our hamlets.	<i>Lumpur Lapindo telah mengubur kampung kami.</i>
Lapindo only gave fake promises.	<i>Lapindo hanya mengobral janji palsu.</i>
The government forsook to restore our lives.	<i>Negara abai memulihkan kehidupan kami.</i>
Our voice will never silence for the nation to not forget.	<i>Suara kami tak pernah padam agar bangsa ini tidak lupa.</i>



Fig. 5.8 Monument of Lapindo mudflow tragedy (Photo courtesy of Lutfi Amiruddin, 2013)

A monument is not only having a function to help people to remember something in the past, it is also a tool to deliver some statements from the past to fit in the present (Hui 2009). Furthermore, it is a practice of articulating particular statements by freezing them and at the same time excluding some others (Assmann 2009). On the so-called “monument of Lapindo mudflow tragedy,” we can see four themes that are trying to deliver. The first is telling us about the impacts of the mudflow and the other three show how the producers of the monument frame the agencies of the Lapindo case: Lapindo is described as the party that has been spreading lies, the government is portrayed as the ignorant, and the victims is framed as the keepers of public memories regarding the tragedy. The chapters that proceed have given the contexts of how such statements come into the monument. These statements

are not only intended as such by the producers of the monument, they are also intended to be immortal, indefinitely. I have discussed how disaster commemorations becoming moments for the social reassemblage of the victims to articulate their version of truth regarding the incident. By making and erecting the monument, they want to warn everyone who came and see it that what is happening is a tragedy in a tombstone.

### **5.8. Inciting to memories, fighting for power**

The newborn mudflow in Porong, East Java has become a major event/process for the people in Porong. Not only that it has brought about a disaster to them, it also has forced them to recall their memories of the hazard not as a natural event but rather a political disaster and create their identity on the grounds those memories. Acting as the survivors and witnesses of the event, these victims creatively establish their agency and identity by recollecting their memories and articulating them through various commemorative practices. Indeed, their autobiographical memories have been rich sources for the historiography of the disaster as well as showing its complexities for each memory contains subjectivities of the remembering actors. In doing so, these victims have to manipulate those memories to win the battle of power over the mudflow.

One could easily claim that the historiography constructed based on collective memories is just another source of ideological domination for such a recollection tends to select particular memories and exclude the others in establishing and maintaining a regime of truth governing the remembering

actors. However, in the course of the mudflow annual commemorations, disaster victims do not just only unload their autobiographical memories and adding different meanings to them (Halbwachs 1980) but what is the most important for this study is the fact that they are struggling to transform these abstract ideas into more concrete social performances (cf. Connerton 1989, 22–24). Only by creating collective memories they become political actors and thus an influential political group in the Indonesian society to define the mudflow. To commemorate a disaster is therefore a battle of power to challenge others' autobiographical and historical memories of the event/process. Such a practice, then, is not merely a psychological, individual process but rather a social, collective process and therefore it is a political process.

Maurice Halbwachs indicates three prominent elements for maintaining collective memories: a group of people, a physical monument, and a social time (Cosser 1992, 22). In the context of the mudflow disaster, there is a group of people (disaster victims) and there is a physical monument (the mudflow/mud lake) and these two elements meet in a particular social time (disaster anniversaries). Victims' collective memories can function as a powerful force for the historiography of the incident and disaster anniversaries, then, are key moments for the production of knowledge about the disaster, especially from the victims' viewpoint.

“May 29” is less than a date in the astronomical calendar because it has become a sacred, social time within which mudflow victims can add, remove or change their meanings about the event/process. In the meanwhile the

artificial mud lake has become a physical monument which helps them to easily recall their collective memories about their past. Thus, it is now really depending on how these victims maintain that particular social time of disaster anniversary by constantly organizing commemorative practices on that date.

In particular moments of disaster commemoration, disaster victims have the opportunity—that they may not get it in other moments—to recall some of their subjective experiences, incorporate some meanings and articulate them publicly through particular theatrical performances. These moments have become a prominent element for the empowerment of disaster victims by facilitating them expressing their identity as “victims of disaster.” However, as the chapter shows instead of identifying themselves as victims of environmental hazard there is a tendency to the creation of a more political cultural identity, i.e., “victims of human politics.” And this is the context that has been shaping the recalling of victims’ memories.

The birth of the unnatural mudflow in Porong, East Java has become a landmark in the history of human-nature relationships in Java for this time the Javanese rabbles have an opportunity to be part of the production of knowledge concerning such relationships. Relying on critical readings into Javanese “cultural knowledges” about human-nature relationships, such are mainly delivering a similar message of the importance of a noble leader, a savior (*ratu adil*) in empowering the Javanese rabbles. The production of knowledge about such relationships has been centering on the courts since the Javanese believe that power is centered in some figures, mainly the kings of the Javanese courts (B. Anderson 2007).

The experience of the mudflow victims in Porong has been showing anomalous situation from those presented in the preexisting knowledge. The men in power are never standing on the side of the victims. Instead, they have been protecting the perpetrator of the mudflow disaster by taking over all the liabilities to deal with further damages resulted from the mudflow. As a result, to expect a political will from the men in power solving the Lapindo case is nothing but a wasting of time. This has somehow undermined democratic legitimacy of the government in favor of money and individual power. Thus, it is the time for the victims themselves to appear as key players to determine their own version of story by bringing into the present particular preexisting traditional narratives to support their version of truth concerning what is happening to them. Disaster commemorations have become discursive fields for the competition of power to win “the truth” over the mudflow in Porong. They are also prominent fields to preserve the claim of “anthropogenic disaster” and to counter the oppositional claim of “natural disaster.” Above all, they have facilitated the seemingly powerless actors, disaster victims, to become the subjects of power, to be an actor of the Lapindo case.

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## Chapter 6 | Conclusion

### 6.1. Conflicting framings, different interests

In this study, I have presented how three different actors of disaster are situated in ongoing, complex power relations owing to the fact that one's efforts to deal with the hazard were always affecting the others'. Each actor maintained certain truth claims and resisted to others' claim concerning the hazard, as a result of somewhat Foucault would have designated it as the "will to truth." These interrelationships characterized how power was being practiced in the society.

There were however many different ways and institutions of each actor to produce, reproduce, and articulate certain statements concerning the disaster. The government played a key role in producing policies and implementing mitigatory countermeasures to handle social and ecological damages resulted from the hazard. As the accused-party initiating the hazard, the company (Lapindo) has been one prominent actor in enlivening and reviving the battle of power by muddling up the social construction of reality concerning the disaster. The seemingly powerless disaster victims entered the battle by creatively recalling preexisting cultural features, establishing their own agency, and resisting to the official definition of the incident. In the course of the disaster, these actors were interrelated each others and power relations between them were shaped within the contexts of how every actor were trying

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to change others' framing of the incident. The competition escalated following the polarization of two dominating framings of the event: "natural disaster" and "industrial accident." This study, as well as many others, has shown that in the course of the disaster there is a tendency of the government and the company working hand in hand supporting the first and the victims maintain the latter. And, as for the data I gathered from mutual trusts with my interlocutors and victim-informants, this study is intended to problematize the first and to address how the latter has been maintained.

Obviously, all parties have agreed to see the mudflow in Porong, East Java as a disaster, yet they framed it differently. Each of the preceding chapters focused on how different actors maintained the discursiveness of the disaster resulting from the mudflow. Although the government and Lapindo promoted the same framing of the mudflow, they had different interests. Whereas the government is situated within the context of how to resume and recover the nation's economy in the aftermath of the disaster, the company is more concerned with how to improve the image of the company and its affiliated individuals. Different from both actors, the victims' interest mainly focused on the concern of how to punish the perpetrator of this catastrophe.

Economic motives is central to Foucault's conception of "governmentality" (Foucault 1991). According to Foucault, the government has the responsibility to provide security its citizens and for this reason economic motives—to meet the needs of its citizens—have been the main purpose for the establishment of a modern nation-state. Indeed, the organization of a modern state is actually rooted in the management of a familial economy. Each citizen is perceived as a

member of the big family of fraternity. Putting this logic into an environmental disaster situation, it has been an ethical obligation of the government as a modern political institution to develop prevention systems and strategies to face environmental hazards and make sure that they would not grow larger and broader. Thus, in dealing with environmental disasters the government's main priority is how to recompense the damages of which means ignoring first the status of the disaster, despite it has the authority to define the event/process. The definition can be done later, but immediate countermeasures must be performed straight away to save the social and environment from the worst that might happen.

In the Lapindo case, the Indonesian government has been situated in serious conflicts of interest that could be detected from the ways of the government composing the mitigation policy and modifying it over the time (chapter 3). Since the mudflow became an environmental hazard that interrupts the national economy, the collateral impacts which reached major industries in southern and eastern regions in East Java and also in Bali were the main concern of the Indonesian government. It seems that the government did not see the importance of finding what had caused the eruption because the most urgent was how to resume and recover the economy. Economic motives became more apparent in the aftermath of the mudflow as for the government only accounted economic factors for the compensation of victims and overlooked other impairments. Thus, instead of resolving the social and ecological crises the disaster politics was just another source for the disaster to be even more systematic (cf. Bryant 1998).

In the meanwhile, as the accused-party initiating the hazard, Lapindo was suffering from moral judgments delivered by general public for being an irresponsible company. Countering such judgments was the contexts of the company's strategy to polish the image from "the bad guy" to "the hero" of the incident by muddling up the social construction of the disaster in various discursive fields. The strategy should be understood in the context that the company is part of a giant conglomerate family in Indonesia, the Bakries, and therefore the Lapindo case had not only infected Lapindo alone but also the family as one single economic entity. It is also the fact that the leading figure of the family Aburizal Bakrie, who was sitting as a minister in the cabinet when the mudflow erupted and currently is the chairperson of the Golkar Party, had a strong motive to secure his company and family from any repercussions of the mudflow.

It was not only economic consequences that Lapindo and the Bakries are worrying about, but also the political and legal consequences that they would face if the mudflow was declared as anthropogenic disaster resulted from Lapindo's drilling activity in the Banjar Panji 1 well. For this very reason, it is understandable if the family was willing to lose so much money to finance media campaigns to counter such a claim so that it would not experience greater losses. One crucial strategy was the refutation of the argument of drilling-trigger mudflow and the promotion of a counter-argument of earthquake theory in various scientific forums, taking a gap in the uncertainty principle in science. Not only that, there has been an effort from the company and the government to put the blame on the nature for causing such an

unnatural catastrophe—something which is against a modern thinking of environmental disasters less as natural than as social/cultural events. Thus, it is very difficult for the proponents of the natural disaster framing to popularize such since the regime of truth is now in favor of the anthropogenic disaster framing. The more the natural disaster framing's proponents are attempting to control the social construction of the disaster, the more they will receive rejections from the society. This situation is somehow very advantageous for the proponents of the industrial accident framing, especially disaster victims, to confront the actors in power.

The framing of "industrial accident" promoted by disaster victims is situated within the contexts of how these people find a way to punish the perpetrator of their sufferings. By looking through historical contexts of the politicization of the Porong region, I noted that the people of Porong are situated in a long history of repression in relation to human management and modification of the environment (chapter 2). The mudflow added another marginalization of these people experience on the ground that the disaster politics has been neglecting their actual needs to recover from the crises. The people can then identify themselves easily as victims of both the mudflow hazard and human politics. Transforming themselves from seemingly powerless to powerful actors the victims competed the other actors in power through the organization of disaster commemorations in which they challenged the pastoral concept of power in the Javanese culture, that is, the power centralized in particular leaders and objects.

The mudflow has situated them in power relations with the other actors in power, the government and the company. From their previous experiences prior to the mudflow, they see that the government never stands on their side. Even more, instead of being the figure to protect and help them to recover from the crises, the government has been one source of these crises by neglecting their needs and interests and favoring the corporations'. In the Lapindo case, the government is in the position of shielding the company and working together with it to frame the incident as just another natural phenomenon. Recalling and challenging Javanese traditions and conception of power, these victims came to a position that it is the time for them to become the subjects of power in defining the historiography of the event/process by utilizing a specific moment of disaster anniversaries as another discursive field by articulating their framing of the event as industrial accident (chapter 5).

## **6.2. Actors of power**

The three actors illustrated how three-dimensional Nietzschean forms of power work in the society (Saar 2010). The government case showed the case of how the "real power" of those in command is practiced through a series of modifications of the environments and therefore controls over the populations. As such, the government issued disaster policies as the legal bases to perform mitigatory actions of the mudflow, define the disaster zone and who shall be considered as disaster victims, and determine sharing responsibility between the company and the government to deal with the disaster. Only with these policies, the government could have the authority to dominate other actors.

The case of Lapindo muddling up the social construction of the disaster showed how “symbolic power” is performed through the creation of meanings of the mudflow in various discursive fields. It addressed how environmental problems are discussed in terms of scientific discourses and brought about the hegemony of scientific authorities in the event. This kind of power put scientists as prominent agents of power in the so-called “modern society,” as if it is up to them nature should be defined correctly. The hegemony determined the way of people interpret the mudflow’s origin but since there are conflicting arguments about it the social construction of the mudflow is characterized by publics’ confusion and distrust of official definition(s).

The case of the mudflow victims performing a series of disaster commemorations illustrated how a third form of power—“imaginary power”—is being practiced. Nietzsche would have called it the “will to power” working within the victims themselves in the course of being the subjects of the social world. It is a key concept to explain how these victims could have the reason and freedom to produce, reproduce and fight for what they believe to be true and against what they claim to be wrong. Punishing the perpetrator was the main idea of the victims since they were not only seeking for the compensation but also justice as well as power. This added to the government’s history of citizen neglect, the history that is rooted in the corrupt governmental apparatuses with some greedy corporations. This could be detected on the symbols the victims designed and performed in a series of commemorative practices of the mudflow. The symbols of the punisher were however changing over the time—from the government (in 2010 & 2011), to the victims

themselves (in 2012 & 2013), to the government again (2014)—yet, the main target remained the same—the corporation.

The Lapindo case led us to the core problem of the social construction of nature. In the Western context, there was a radical shift of human-nature relation ideology from the medieval conceptions of human beings as “part of nature, part of God’s creation” to the modern, scientific ideas that put humans to be “ontologically distinct from nature” (Oliver-Smith 2002, 30). However, living a modernized world, we should have reconsidered the distinction between “human” and “nature” as to our physical environments are a result of rapid human modifications of nature and therefore they are never entirely natural but hybrid instead. It is now not that humans are part of nature, but more likely that nature is part of human cultures. This idea preexisted, too, in the Javanese cultures. Living in perhaps the most hazard-prone island in the archipelago with active volcanoes and other geological threats, the formation of Javanese societies and cultures is shaped within the context of how people consider their both fertile and catastrophic environments as parts of their social and political lives (Christie 2015; Reid 2015).

As chapter 5 shown, the coming of modern, scientific, Western rationalization of nature and natural phenomena did not simultaneously replace the Javanese cultural, traditional explanations. To a degree scientific rationalizations exerted the search of hidden traditional narratives and marked what philosopher Jean-François Lyotard would have called “the postmodern condition” characterized by the “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). In this context, scientific explanations added preexisting narratives

of nature circulating in the society and stimulated the quest of other, conflicting narratives that might be non-scientific ones. Foucault would have designated those narratives as “discourses” transmitting and producing power in the society (Foucault 1978, 101). Discourse is not only as a group of statements, but also as a “regulated practice” allowing the articulation of some statements or silencing some others; it is therefore a power practice (Foucault 1972, 80).

To that end, the idea of disaster that is resulted from the unnatural mudflow in Porong, East Java should be understood as a “discourse.” Indeed, the mudflow case shows us how “disaster” is a contested concept with “blurred edges” and one main concern of that contestation is a question of whether it is “a set of physical impacts or a set of socially constructed perceptions” (Oliver-Smith 1999, 22). To some extent this study affirms and adds to the latter arguing that disaster is not only a set of perceptions but also it may only occur in the presence of vulnerability in facing environmental hazards. It is to say that human actors are required for a disaster to exist; they are needed not only as their role as victims, but also determiner of whether environmental hazards would turn into or interpreted as “a disaster” (Button 1999). As this study has shown, the existence of an idea that humans might have produced such hazardous environments situated the disaster in a more complicated state.

### **6.3. Actors of anthropogenic disaster**

The Lapindo case has become a trigger for the emerging discourse of “anthropogenic disaster” in Indonesia. For the people of Porong, the case has

left a deep physical and psychological wound with regard to the social and ecological impacts of the mudflow. To date the eruption has yet to stop and this has raised more uncertainties of the possibility of the mudflow-impacted area expansion. Nonetheless, the image of social and ecological destructions of the mudflow has spread all over the country and become a terror for the people who live side by side with (or planned to be) a mining area. In Sidoarjo, the terror is manifested in the villagers' refusal against Lapindo drilling in Kalidawir village (ARA 2012). In fact, the Regent of Sidoarjo said that he would not issue another permit for Lapindo in his territory if the company has not yet completed its obligation to recompense all the "inside map" victims (Sumedi 2013). In Jombang, East Java, residents rejected Exxon Mobile's plan to do exploration of oil (Praditya 2013). From Bandulan, Central Java, a geothermal exploration is rejected by the locals (Munir 2014). In Samarinda, East Kalimantan, local residents are questioning the mudflow that occurred in an oil exploration well of French company, Total (Anonymous 2013). All these resistances are coming from a spreading fear of a second "Lapindo mudflow" would occur to them.

The fear results in the increase of local resistances against mining activities in several places in Indonesia. In the meantime, a network of non-governmental organizations is making the birthday of the mudflow, May 29, as the Anti-Mining Day ("*Hari Anti Tambang*"; abbreviated as "Hantam," a language play of "to smash"). Every year since 2011, publics' solidarity for the mudflow victims in various cities in Indonesia has transformed into a movement to reject mining

by using the Lapindo case as a symbol of humanitarian tragedy due to a defective mining.

There are certainly more actors of this extraordinary disaster who have to be excluded for the purpose of answering this study's research question. There are still plenty of aspects that have not been written about the disaster. This study however proposes another truth of the disaster. This study is not an end, but rather a beginning for further inquiries addressing how actor and power are related to one and another in the context of environmental disasters. And therefore I am very aware that by writing it I have taken a role of being another agent of the anthropogenic disaster.

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