

# 2. Narratives of natural disaster survivors in Indonesian media

**Abstract:** Dubbed as the ‘ring of fire,’ Indonesian territories have witnessed many forms of natural disasters such as volcano eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis, which had been widely reported in the mass media. While the media has reported the scale of destruction and number of casualties caused by those disasters, they have also narrated dramatic recounts of the survivors. Imbued with spectacular imagery, the media seek to appeal to the audiences emotionally and evoke sentiments of solidarity as well as humanitarian actions. Employing a textual analysis of media reports in Indonesia, particularly from the weekly news magazine *Tempo*, this study explores the way in which the media frame the narratives of the survivors of natural disasters (volcano eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis) across Indonesia. Although the media are expected to report events objectively, this study demonstrates the affective element in the practice of journalism on natural disasters. Therefore, this study will contribute to the growing research on the relationship between media and disasters, particularly in the context of a disaster-prone country such as Indonesia. In particular, it will contribute to the body of journalism research which looks at the role of narrating the human subject in tragic events such as natural disasters.

**Keywords:** compassion fatigue, Indonesia, journalism, media, narrative, natural disaster survivors, textual analysis, trauma journalism

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I am building my career on the misery of others.  
Anderson Cooper (as cited by Masse, 2011)

Touch so many people’s pain and grief  
And not be burned. Tell me you could  
Look into a hundred children’s eyes.  
Dark, huge with uncomprehending  
Pain and hunger, and purge yourself  
Of all you feel in a thousand world or so.  
So we grow our shell...  
Terry Anderson (1994, p. 33)

## Introduction

**T**HE NEWS about natural disasters from every corner of the world routinely and constantly bombard us with humanitarian emergencies, dramatic narratives of survival or heartache in big cities or remote areas struck by earthquake, tsunami, hurricane or volcano eruption, despite the possibility of the ‘compassion fatigue’ (Moeller, 1999, p. 2) of the general public. However, in appreciating the global response toward one devastating natural disasters in the world, the former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan called the 2004 Asian tsunami emergency turned out to be ‘a unique display of the unity of the world’. This is understandable since there is no ordinary response of the international community to distant suffering comparable to that for the catastrophic tidal wave along the Indian Ocean coastline, which swept away more than a quarter of a million people on 26 December 2004. Indeed, mass media played a crucial role in reporting and circulating the images and narratives of victims and survivors of the tsunami that lead to the global solidarity and humanitarian acts.

Unlike the stereotypical view of journalists as ‘uncaring, careless voyeurs exploiting others’ pain for shallow reasons’ (Anderson, 2011, p. ix), understandably journalists at the sites of natural disasters have been emotionally affected by the tragic events they observed and reported. New research shows that journalists are first responders and they often deal with the same types of post-traumatic stress that victims do (Kyle, 2012). It is clear that natural disasters have affected not only people living in the disaster areas, but also journalists who observe and report those events. The emotional or affect elements play an important role in reporting the natural disasters, particularly their impacts on people through a humanistic perspective. The narratives of survivors are important because they allow the readers to look at the way media construct human tragedy, trauma, or show the ‘affect’ element in journalism practice. Therefore, this article seeks to examine the ways affect shapes the news narratives on natural disasters in Indonesia.

## Theoretical framework

In mapping the theories of disasters, Pantii et al. (2012) point out four modes of theorising disasters: (1) cosmopolitan moments; (2) disaster shocks; (3) mediated public crises; and (4) focusing events. While the first mode underscores that the disasters encourage an awareness of global interdependency, the second mode highlights the appropriation of disasters by political and economic elites to assert forms of social and political control. The third and fourth modes, which emphasise the mediated and discursive elements of disasters, are closely related to the discipline of media and communication. Furthermore, by conceptualizing disasters as a social product or social construction, it highlights its basic human

emotions of care, empathy and suffering (Joye, 2014). Through the mediation process disasters become events of ‘distant suffering’ (Boltanski, 1999) creating moral and political dilemmas for the spectators who cannot directly intervene to affect the circumstances in which the suffering takes place because of their remoteness.

Therefore, media become a key important agent in studying disasters. In the words of Pantti et al. (2012, p. 33): ‘Disasters and crises today are principally defined, dramatized and constituted in and through media and communications.’ The central role of media as a dominant or often only source of information has led to the notion of a disaster as a media construction. Furthermore, media constitute disasters and condition how they become known, defined and responded to and politically aligned. When mediated, disasters are often narrated according to established cultural codes and scripts and invested with emotions.

Disasters bring a flood of powerful emotions to the public sphere (Pantti et al., 2012). A substantial amount of media coverage is devoted today to the emotions of those who have suffered or otherwise been affected by disasters. It is through media representations that readers relate to journalists bearing witness to the shock, grief, fear and anger of the victims of disasters. It is also through the process of media representations that individual experiences and emotions become collective and political and gain larger meaning. With emotional expressions at the heart both media and humanitarian representations are aiming to capture our attention and encourage people to engage.

The coverage of natural disasters by the news media provides both representation and narrative of ‘unknowable’ and ‘unshareable’ experience of the survivors. The practice of journalism in reporting natural disasters should consider both informational and affective element shaped by the confessional culture as well as affective public culture. In other words, representations of emotions are powerful means for imagining unified communities and offering normative scripts of how we should respond. Emotional response to disasters are guided by narrative scripts in which news reports lead us toward certain emotions and suggest the feelings that are suitable in a given situation. In the Indonesian context, the narrative of natural disasters in the news media allows the suffering of those in the distant places to be seen and heard due to the vastness of Indonesia and the presence of barriers in transportation. Therefore, according to Pantti et al. (2012, p. 75), ‘news media are not reporting on emotions but also generating them and educating us about them and thus have an important role to the global politics of disaster’.

Considering a wide area of media-centered research related to disasters, Stijn Joye (2014) identifies three main subfields of scholarly enquiry, namely (1) production and selection; (2) content and the representation of disasters; and (3) media, disasters and the audience. The subfield of production and selection

particularly investigates the process of producing images and narratives against the backdrop of journalism studies which consists of theories on news values (news worthiness), gatekeeping or the work of foreign correspondents in disaster areas. In addition, there are other subjects in this subfield such as journalist practices, professional commitments and personal emotional investments when reporting disasters, including photojournalism and the moral issues in producing images of death, pain and suffering (Hanusch, 2010; Sontag, 2003).

In the subfield of content and representation of disasters, scholars pay critical attention to the repetitive use of visual and narrative stereotypes and recurring frame in disasters coverage; the representation of pity and the ‘othering’ of distant sufferers; articulation of power imbalance; and the naturalisation and depoliticisation of disasters. For instance, Chouliaraki’s seminal study (2006) critically observes and explains the discursive reproduction of symbolic inequalities and representational hierarchies in the mediation of disasters and other humanitarian crises. My study can be classified in this subfield as it demonstrates the affective elements in the journalistic work on natural disasters in Indonesia. Meanwhile, the third subfield of media, disaster and audience concerns the matter of audience consumption and reception of disasters in, by and through media. The research subjects include the different categories of emotional commitment, moral response and dispositions of the audience.

### **Methodology**

This study was conducted using a qualitative (textual) analysis by reading closely the news feature on the main forms of natural disasters from the respected Indonesian news magazine *Tempo*. Unlike a (quantitative) content analysis (Holsti, 1968; Krippendorf, 2004), this research method does not count the frequency of particular news items in order to find out the coverage tendency of the media. As Van Dijk remarks: ‘Qualitative analysis is more relevant to describe how it is done than how it is often’ (Van Dijk, 1988, p. 18). Thus, this study looks closely at the narrative structure of selected news since narrative is an essential component of how the news media select and structure information. According to Conboy (2007), news media consist predominantly of stories, not of facts (p. 141); thereby, journalists do not compile reports, they tell stories.

The factual events of the world are turned into news by the process of selection, mapped onto news values which can be seen as longer-term narratives in themselves. These stories then become inserted into the news media in ways that enable the audience to make sense of how they fit in culturally (Conboy, 2007, p. 44). Hence, narratives are the reflection and production of nothing less than our general cultural assumption and values—what we consider important, trivial, fortunate, tragic, good, evil and what impels movement from one to another (Martin, as cited in Richardson, 2005, p. 158-159). As such, news narratives

illustrate and propagate social values, providing us with a means of organising and comprehending the events of the world around us. As Foss (cited in Richardson, 2005, p. 158) suggests, '[N]arratives help us impose order on the flow of experience so that we can make sense of events and actions in our live[s]'. Yet narratives are always specific to particular cultures and valued in terms of what they reveal about its concerns of contemporary society and can tell a reader much about the values and beliefs of their culture and content.

Since it began publishing, *Tempo* magazine (est. 1971) deliberately employed a narrative journalism style because the founders have background as poet or writer rather than formal journalism training (see Steele, 2005; Setiyarso & Redaksi KPG, 2011). This is clearly reflected in *Tempo*'s motto '*enak dibaca*' (pleasure to read), which uses both a facility with language and a story-like format. The selection of news reports of *Tempo* magazine for this study is based on major natural disasters in Indonesia such as tsunami, volcano eruption and earthquake; thereby, news reports on other common natural disasters in Indonesia (such as floods, landslides and windstorms) are excluded in this study. This study analyses nine selected news articles (corpuses) from five editions of *Tempo* magazine. There are five news reports on tsunami in Aceh (Sumatra), whereas only one news item on Merapi eruption in Yogyakarta (Java). This is understandable since tsunami in Aceh is an anticipated and great natural disaster in contemporary Indonesia in comparison to the periodic Merapi eruptions near Yogyakarta.

### **Findings and analysis**

Natural disasters frequently occupy in the Indonesian media as headline news, especially those with high death tolls. There are some typical characteristics of media reports of natural disasters in Indonesia. Firstly, media reports are not an organic part of the mitigation process. Instead, most Indonesian media tend to pay more attention to immediate disaster events and simply neglect to the importance of informing preparedness in dealing with recurrent events of disaster in the disaster prone areas like Indonesia. Secondly, there are the delayed responses of the media institution in dispatching their reporters to the disaster areas because Indonesian media are predominantly located in the capital Jakarta (main island of Java) while disasters are occurring across Indonesia (Arif, 2010).

Thirdly, media tend to exploit and make dramatised stories about the suffering survivors in order to raise a wide solidarity and funds in order to help relief services (Arif, 2010). In particular, television news on disasters are accompanied by footage of people in the disaster areas with slow motion techniques and emotional music score. Fourthly, there is lack of information on post-natural disaster (rehabilitation and reconstruction process). This is because media in Indonesia seem interested in reporting physical destruction and death tolls rather

than various efforts to rebuild public facilities and houses in the post-disaster period. In his article on the media coverage of tsunami in Aceh, Andreas Harsono (2015) remarked a serious bias of Indonesian journalists was due to the lack of understanding of local stories from the local people's perspective. In particular, rather than delivering detailed reports on conditions of people after tsunami, Indonesian journalists are interested in conveying the statements of political elites in Jakarta who provoke religious and nationalist sentiments due to activities of missionary and foreign humanitarian aid workers in Aceh. Unlike those typical characteristics, some news features of *Tempo* magazine demonstrate a 'humanistic' journalism by employing a narrative style, particularly in the reports on the survivors of tsunami in Aceh, earthquake and volcano eruption in Yogyakarta.

#### *Aceh Tsunami on Boxing Day 2004*

Since the tsunami on 26 December 2004 as a devastating natural disaster in contemporary Indonesia, *Tempo* paid a lot of attention in covering and putting in its Main Report (*Laporan Utama*). Although Indonesia is well known as a disaster-prone country, the Aceh tsunami truly had a great resonance across Indonesia, which raised a genuine solidarity among many Indonesians. Despite dominant news about the devastating impacts of tsunami on public facilities in Banda Aceh city, there are narratives of survivors who faced severe mental problems as a result of having witnessed death and destruction. The piled-up, unburied bodies were grim reminders to survivors of what had happened to friends and relatives. This excerpt from a feature article illustrates emotionally the impacts of tsunami on mental health:

In the street of Teuku Nyak Arief, a middle-aged man dragged a suitcase under the blaring sun on the third day of tsunami. He checked every corpse that he passed by thoroughly. He remained silent. His eyes were blank. 'My kid is not discovered,' he had repeated softly.

He stopped in the front of a corpse of a child. It had been the stiffened body of a five-year-old. He bowed and wrapped the corpse with fabric, hugging it. He was seen carrying that corpse while dragging his suitcase along the pedestrian path. It was unclear where he was heading to. (*Tempo*, 9 January 2005) (1)

Likewise, there is another story of a woman who lost her son and kept looking around for him. There is a detailed description of her troubled mental conditions:

'*Aneuk lon ho...? Aneuk lon ho...? Where is my child? Where is my child?*' The 35-year-old woman calls out in Acehnese repeatedly. She spoke those sentences with a soft voice, almost like a whisper, as she treaded on, following a straight path. Her gaze remains blank. This woman was ignorant to her surroundings. Even when there were those who inquire her name, she refused to answer them.

The woman's appearance was largely bedraggled. Her skin and clothes were coated in dried mud, her hair was undone and flowing past her shoulder, mingling with mud and there was a healing wound across her cheek. Barefooted, she prodded on with a wooden walking stick (*Tempo*, 16 January 2005)

It is clear that the two news reports narrate the deep psychological impact of tsunami at the personal level through the narrative of loss and grief. In the news reports, both the man and woman, who lost their children and continue to look for them throughout the disaster areas, are disillusioned with their surroundings. Whereas the man attempts to seek a substitute for his lost son by randomly picking up a corpse of a child and carrying him around, the woman keeps walking throughout the disaster areas.

Meanwhile, in order to provide a more intimate account of the tsunami, there is a story of *Tempo* journalist Nezar Patria, who contemplated the loss of his relatives and hometown destroyed by tsunami. In his article entitled 'History Ended in Our Kampong' (*Sejarah Mati di Kampungku*), Patria evoked a personal reminiscence of Banda Aceh prior to the moment the tsunami swept away his hometown mercilessly. He was glad that his family members survived although his neighbour passed away. The following is the narrative of the tsunami from Patria's intimate perspective:

The fact that the house is completely ravaged is unimaginable! To think that just a month ago, I was able to sleep soundly in the loft. There is only a concrete wall left to stand, pointing to the sky. The roof had flown somewhere – to God knows where. The windows upstairs are bereft of the shutters. In the living room, the chairs are strewn around upside down, blanketed with blackened mud. There, a lone China – a family heirloom, had shattered to smithereens.

Mother's favorite garden in the lawn no longer exists. The maidenhair ferns, carnations and Japanese lawn grass which used to flourish have all been obliterated. It seems as if the mound of wood waste now is fighting its way into the house from all sides.

Despite the sea being a fair five kilometers away, a large ship had washed ashore in front of our house – its body close to toppling down. Underneath it, an unknown sedan lays crushed. Its metal doors had collapsed. Beyond the garage doors, there are two cars, overlapping each other—just like a pair of freshly toasted sandwich. One of them belongs to ours, and another belongs to our neighbor.

Just above our car, the bodies of our close neighbors, Yusuf and Nurhayati lay frozen. The couple had passed away together with one of their grandchildren. In one of the canals, a corpse dressed in jeans remains. I could not recognise it: its head had plunged into a water channel.

None of my neighbours' houses were left standing when I visited Kam-pung Mulia in the sub-district of Kuta Alam in the capital Banda Aceh. There, all of the houses had been gutted to the ground. I am thankful that my older sibling's family who had stayed in our house, had survived. The boundaries between one house to another had been swept away to nothing. There is only a mud field which had submerged the debris. The roads and alleys in the village had disappeared. All of a sudden, I had lost my own space—and history. (*Tempo*, 12 January 2005)

By employing a diary-like style in his writing, Patria expresses an intimate view of the impact of the tsunami on his family. Despite the massive destructions, tsunami has swept away most valuable things owned by a Patria's family such as his mother's favorite garden, a family heirloom (a lone China) and family car. Most importantly, he watches by himself the dead bodies of his close neighbor.

It is noteworthy that there are some stories of the lost children who needed to regroup with their relatives or to find the foster parents. Such stories bring a powerful emotion to the readers since it is not easy for children to cope with the sudden loss of their beloved family and to continue of their lives alone without any supports from their parents or adults. The journalist of *Tempo* also provided a story of the tsunami through the child's point of view:

In another place, a twelve-year-old boy, Iqbal, ate from a bowl of rice with sardines as a side dish. He had a skinny stature and a sunburnt skin. There was a scar marking his thin, right cheek.

He was daydreaming. When the tsunami had swept his city, he had been playing in the Islamic boarding school Ibnu Hasyim, Lamjame, Aceh Besar [...]. (*Tempo*, 16 Januari 2005)

The moment when tsunami swept away Banda Aceh into debris is also described through the experience of another ten-year-old child named Azhari:

Every Sunday morning, Azhari turns into a king: the television's remote control at home is under the rule of the ten-year-old child that day. His parents and his older sibling, who was studying in high school at that time, have to relent to watching Azhari's favorite animated robot film even though it does not suit their taste.

On a Sunday, in the fateful date of 26 December 2004, they, too, were watching Azhari's favourite show on television. Only, the show was halfway through when a powerful earthquake struck their home at Lambaro, Sibreh, Greater Aceh, Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam. 'Ari, you have to run!' his mother had thus ordered him to follow the flow of people fleeing away from the village. Meanwhile, Ari's parents attempted to salvage important documents.



It took only a moment for a tidal wave to sweep their house clean. Amidst the hordes of people fleeing, Azhari rounded a corner into an opened shop. As the tendrils of the tsunami began to touch his body, a hand reached out and pulled him to the second store of the building. God had made His decision: Azhari would survive.

It should be noted that in general the narratives of tsunami survivors in Banda Aceh occupy only few spaces in *Tempo* magazine in comparison with the stories of evacuation process, humanitarian aid and the economic losses due to the tsunami. However, *Tempo* has attempted to provide more personal narratives to appeal emotionally to its readers. Despite providing vivid descriptions of terrible physical conditions of the survivors, those news reports shows the plight of survivors in facing their uncertain future after the event of tsunami.

#### *Devastating earthquake in Yogyakarta*

Similar to narratives of tsunami survivors in Aceh, narratives of survivors comprise only a small part of other feature stories on humanitarian aids, economic impacts, and the ruins of cultural heritages such as the Hindu temple of Prambanan. This is perhaps understandable due to the scale of destructions of the earthquake in Yogyakarta on 27 May 2006. However, narratives of survivors constitute the magnitude of devastating impacts of the earthquake on the people of Yogyakarta. In spite of the narratives of search and rescue of the victims, there are some narratives of survival such as eating a banana hump (suckers) while waiting for the food aid. The following news feature tells the way in which an earthquake survivor resolves the crisis of food stock after the disaster event:

Without bananas, the suckers would suffice. The 74-year-old man, better known as Mbah Darso, would strip the banana trees to their roots with his ageing prowess. He would then dispose the entire tree, leaving behind only the suckers which were still adorned with the trailing roots. The size of the suckers would shrink to a third of its initial size once they were cleaned. The resulting transparent product would then be minced, mixed with coconut milk to cook a *gudeg*. 'It tastes sweet,' Darso comments at its taste.

Of course, the elder person's comment above was not intended to praise that sucker is tasty, but rather it showed the way the earthquake survivor must accept their miserable situation by eating an inedible food in order to survive. Despite the lack of food supply, the earthquake survivors also must deal with the lack a shelter facility. Some earthquake survivors stayed temporarily in the graveyard and cowshed, but they still felt unsafe due to recurrent tremors or earthquakes:

Without any tent, the cowshed would suffice as a shelter for the villagers. Such was the plight of the earthquake victims in the hamlet of Soka, the

village of Karang Asem, Pundong sub-district of the Bantul district. The cowshed which was utilized as a shelter was owned by Kusdi, a 45-year-old man. The massive earthquake not only ravaged Kusdi's house, but his neighbors as well. There were no buildings left standing for shelter. Rather than lying underneath the stars in the village field, Kusdi resigned to having his children, wife and neighbors sleep in the cowshed.

Though there had been donations in the form of tents, there were not enough to go around for the hamlet's entire populace. The official of the hamlet did not wish to take the risk of distributing the tents—for fear of spurring envy among the population, as not all of them would receive the tents. 'Sleeping in the cowshed would be much safer,' Kusdi had responded.

The above news report not only indicates the problem of insufficient distribution of tents for the village people, but it also shows the difficulties for some survivors to seek a shelter after the earthquake had destroyed their house. Although the cowshed perhaps is inappropriate place for human settlement, it is only a viable shelter rather than sleeping outdoor without canopy. Of course, this difficult situation might encourage an emphatic response of the readers towards the earthquake survivor.

Similar to the narrative of the plight of Acehnese children after the event of tsunami, there is an evocative narrative on a seven-year-old Cesi who had lost her father and continued carrying her father's photograph. Here is Cesi's story:

This is Cesi Nurbandini. She is seven years old. Her mother cut grass for a living while her father worked as a construction labourer. The family lived in Dawuran, a thriving village in the sub-district of Plered in Bantul—the southernmost region in Yogyakarta. Despite her father's meagre salary, she and her mother lived happily. Cesi owned a panda stuffed toy.

On a Saturday morning, May 27, the little girl accompanied her mother sweeping the lawn. Her father remained fast asleep—his work the previous day, which had lasted until evening, had thoroughly exhausted him. Out of a sudden, the ground underneath shook. The ground beneath their lawn split open, the trees surrounding their house swung violently. As fast as a lightning, her mother grabbed Cesi's body, making their way to the main road. Fast.

Cesi's mother halted to a pause. The sudden halt in her movement had almost flung the girl away. The woman had turned hysterical, screaming with all her might for her husband. There was no response. From afar, it was visible that their house had collapsed completely to the ground. There were dust floating towards the sky—yet, where was Cesi's father? (...)

When the earth had visibly calmed, they [the villagers] ventured back to look at their house. So does Cesi and her mother. Cesi's stuffed panda lie amidst the rubble, yet, where was Cesi's father?

Mbah Putri, Cesi's grandmother, would then lead Cesi to a place.

There, Cesi saw the figure of her father in a deep slumber being washed. 'Your father has died,' Mbah had explained. The casualties in the village of Dawuran reached 60 lives. In the entire sub-district of Plered, the death toll reached 500.

In the same day, Cesi's father was buried. Amid the rubble, the little girl discovered a photograph of her father posing with a pair of denims while shirtless. Every night, she sleeps hugging his photograph in the evacuees' tent. It was this photograph which Cesi showed to her friends when they asked for her father. (*Tempo*, 11 June 2006)

As can be seen, the narrative begins with a normal day prior to the sudden and severe earthquake in a village of the southernmost region in Yogyakarta. By focusing on a seven-year girl (Cesi), the narrative forces the readers to emotionally engage with the shocking loss of her father. The first paragraph of the news report, which states Cesi's previous happy life with her family, contrasts the devastating earthquake which was mentioned to have ruined the happiness and the unity of her family. Rather than providing detailed information of the physical destruction and economic loss, the news report emphasises the psychological impact of the earthquake on the survivors.

The news feature above also illustrates the touching way in which a little girl (child) copes with the loss of a loved one by keeping the photograph of her father. Instead of using her panda stuffed toy as a substitute for a company, the photograph of her father remains as a sleeping companion to her. The photograph also serves as a memento for the loss of her father ever since she has lost everything. Although there is no mention of Cesi's reaction to her grandmother reporting the death of her father, the loss of her father had indeed inflicted a deep trauma within her. This is evident in how she is simply unable to forget her father by carrying the photograph of him.

#### *Mount Merapi eruption in Yogyakarta*

In comparison to the aforementioned natural disasters, the Mount Merapi eruption seems to be an 'ordinary' event, given the position of Indonesia in the 'ring of fire'. Clearly, this can be seen in the cover of *Tempo* magazine which featured a US President Barack Obama who visited Indonesia on 9 November 2010. Since Obama spent his childhood in Jakarta from 1967 to 1971, his visit occupied most media headlines in Indonesia. The cover of *Tempo* shows an illustration of Obama wearing *songkok* (skull cap) with the caption under his image: 'Obama Returns Home' (*Obama Pulang*). In contrast, the news of the Merapi eruption appeared in small text on the top of the magazine cover: 'New Characteristics of Merapi Eruption' (*Tabiat Baru Letusan Merapi*).

It should be noted that Yogyakarta residents had been accustomed to the natural signs which indicate to a future eruption prior to the event itself. As such, it was of no surprise to the residents when the eruption had killed 275 peoples

and created physical catastrophes in its surroundings. In fact, the large number of human casualties to Mount Merapi eruptions is due to the area's high population density. As is well known, Mount Merapi is the most active among the 100 active volcanoes in Indonesia as well as the most dangerous volcanoes on earth that generates the lava, hot clouds (*awan panas*) and volcanic material (*lahar*). The Mount Merapi eruption in 2010 was dubbed as the biggest in the last 100 years since the spread of hot clouds reached seven kilometers and the volcanic material reached seventeen kilometers with the *volcanic explosivity index* 4 similar with its eruption in 1872 (*Tempo*, 14 November 2010).

The narrative central of the *Tempo*'s reports is in fact the death of the loyal Merapi guardian (affectionately called Mbah Maridjan) who had refused to leave his house by the order of Sultan of Yogyakarta (Hamengku Buwono X). Appointed by the Sultan of Yogyakarta (Hamengku Buwono IX) in 1982, Mbah Maridjan was responsible for leading a sacrificial ceremony (*Labuhan*) in Merapi in order to maintain the cosmic balance between Mount Merapi and the *keraton* (Sultan Palace). He was also responsible for the welfare of the inhabitants of Merapi, the *keraton* and people of Yogyakarta. The refusal of Mbah Maridjan to leave his village (Kinahrejo) can be interpreted as a form of resistance since Sultan Hamengku Buwono X (successor and son of Hamengku Buwono IX) allowed businessmen to sell stones and sands emanated from Mount Merapi. Schelle's study (1996) on the Merapi eruption of 22 November 1994 indicates that the volcanic eruption was perceived by the people of Yogyakarta as a 'warning' (or spirits' admonition) rather than a disaster in which mystical traditions are revived and reinterpreted. The warning is not only directed to the people living in the slope of Merapi and Yogyakarta, but also to the ruler or political leaders due their disinterest in spiritual things and their policies. Another narrative is the death of a brave journalist who usually reported the Merapi eruption closely. The traumatic experience of Maridjan's son when he discovered the death of his father to the hot smoke emanating from Merapi can be read in this excerpt feature:

The rescue team discovered another two bodies inside Mbah Maridjan's house. One of which was Tatur, a Red Cross volunteer. Tatur had prior experience as a volunteer during the Boxing Day Tsunami in Aceh, the Yogyakarta earthquake as well as the Padang earthquake. When the team was in the midst of finding Mbah Maridjan, Asih had arrived. He could no longer hold back his tears at the devastating sight of the house he had lived in with his mother, father, children and his wife. At that moment, the fate of Mbah Maridjan was unknown.

Asih confided that on that Tuesday night, he had wanted to deliver an errand from the Keraton in Yogyakarta for Mbah Maridjan to slaughter a black goat. The act of slaughter was intended to complete an offering, where he was also required to offer coconut, banana as well as flowers

of three varying colors. When he had reached the steps to his house, Asih had stood frozen. He had thought his father had died. (*Tempo*, 11 November 2010)

Beginning with the discovery of dead bodies in the Mbah Maridjan's house by the rescue team in the disaster area, the news report above narrates Asih's (Mbah Maridjan's son) emotional response to finding his father's body. The death of Mbah Maridjan can perhaps be interpreted as a dramatic end of his refusal to leave his house in Kinahrejo and his longstanding resistance towards resettlement in the surrounding area or in areas further away due his responsibility as the guardian of Merapi, although for many it looks like a suicidal act. The act of Mbah Maridjan may symbolise a loyalty to his duty and firm conviction regardless of the life-threatening situation. The news report above also reveals the devastating impact of the eruption on Asih's childhood home. Essentially, the news report not only narrates the physical devastation caused by the earthquake, but it also shows the destruction of good memory of a family.

### **Conclusion**

This study focuses on one leading Indonesian news magazine *Tempo*, while excluding other news media. This is because *Tempo* is widely known as a pioneer in practising narrative journalism in Indonesia, while at the same time has consistently maintained the high quality of its reports. Thus, the three main conclusions, which are drawn from this study, should not be treated as a general reflection of journalism practices in Indonesia.

First, narratives on natural disaster survivors are substantially underrepresented in the media as compared to the chronology of the disaster and its socio-economic impacts. By reporting the chronology and devastating impacts of natural disasters, Indonesian journalists are able to show the dramatic and spectacular event of natural disasters. In contrast, the stories of personal experience of natural disaster survivors are too subtle and are less spectacular in order to attract the readers.

Secondly, trauma and severe mental problems are part of the narratives of natural disaster survivors. As is well known, natural disasters always create shock, grief and fear where people are emotionally quite unprepared with the sudden events and loss. Moreover, the images of piled-up and unburied corpses in the disaster areas serve as a reminder for the survivors of the loss of their family members, friends and loved ones.

Thirdly, media narrates the conditions of children as the most vulnerable group in the post-disaster period. Unlike adults, children face many difficulties to cope with the loss of their parents and to continue their life alone without any social supports. In particular, the narratives about the conditions of these children have

a powerful emotional appeal for the readers. However, in the case of child adoption after the tsunami in Aceh has provoked religious and nationalist sentiments due to the missionary and international humanitarian aid workers.

### Note

1. The news reports (features) cited throughout this article are originally in Indonesian. All the translations are the author's.

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