

Tsunami in the Collective Memory: A Reception Study of the Visitors of Tsunami Memorials in Aceh, Indonesia

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Abstract. Disaster tourism could be defined as tourism practices based on certain disasters, both natural and cultural, which happened in the past. It melts the enjoyment and trauma, when people come and enjoy the monument of disaster or damaged place caused by a disaster. Thus, many questions arise: why do people come as tourists to disaster artefacts? How do people make meaning of the disaster artefacts? The paper examines this question, taking the visitors of Tsunami Museum, PLTD Apung Monument, and Kapal Tsunami Lampulo as study cases. The paper aims to describe the meaning of disaster tourism activities constructed by the visitors of these three memorials. The broader purpose of the study is to understand why and how people enjoy the disaster tourism destinations. The paper is based on qualitative research done in these three memorials in Aceh, Indonesia. The fieldwork to collect primary data was conducted in three months in 2015 and another three months in 2017, optimizing in-depth interviews and observations. The study concludes that disaster tourism activities are closely related to individual and collective memory. The Acehnese or the outsider, who is deeply related to the place or has direct experience of the tsunami, construct the meaning of their activities as remembering and recreational activities, which is closely associated with their inner level of memory. While the Indonesian and foreigners who do not have firsthand experience of the disaster construct the meaning of their visits as educational and recreational activities, which is related to the collective memory of the 2004 tsunami. Thus, the study confirms some previous studies that have emphasized that disaster tourism could have different roles and change its function to suit visitors' needs.

Keywords: disaster tourism, collective memory, Tsunami Museum, PLTD Apung Monument, Kapal Tsunami Lampulo.

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Introduction

Tsunami that occurred on December 26, 2004 became history's greatest natural disasters that have occurred in Indonesia. The tsunami waves that reached a height of 30 meters successfully scowled as many casualties as 230,000 people. It also became the third largest ever recorded on a seismograph with a duration reaches 10 minutes. As for the impact of the tsunami is the number of residents who had lost their relatives and the destruction of municipal infrastructure which is almost flush with the ground.

A lot of unbelievable things happened, for example the thrown of huge ship from the sea to the earth, known as PLTD Apung. It then turned into PLTD Apung monument as the witness's enormity of the tsunami. Government to build up the monument is due to the desire of the community to remember the disaster that happened. Besides, the development Aceh Tsunami Museum is also for memorizing the tsunami, completed with a variety of silent witnesses and other artifacts. Both these monuments have the same values, describing and memorizing the disaster through the objects associated with the tsunami.

Nowadays people have a unique enjoyment, namely visiting the disaster sites as tourist destination. For example, Monument PLTD Apung and Tsunami Museum located in the city center of Banda Aceh. The number of visitors who came to these two places reached remarkable. At the time of Idul Fitri 2014 vacation, the number of visitors amounted to 10.009 people at Tsunami Museum (<http://aceh.tribunnews.com/2015/07/22/museum-tsunami-diserbu-warga>). Besides, visitors who come to Monument PLTD Apung reached around 25,000 people in a every month.

People interest in visiting disaster tourism can also create positive effects, such as raising the awareness the nature of Indonesia as a disaster-prone country. Not only that, it could also teach people how to understand and respond to disaster, as well as to give contribution after the disaster. Thus, disaster tourism could be a tool for educating people on disaster.

Disaster tourism, defined as tourism destination and practice based on certain disaster, both natural and cultural, which happened in past, is a very interesting phenomenon, which should be studied in the field of disaster or tourism studies especially. On the one side, disaster is a negative and traumatic event in the human history. On the other side, tourism is a practice of using leisure time which has close connotation with happiness and enjoyment. In this general sense, disaster tourism melts the enjoyment and trauma, when people come and enjoy the monument of disaster or damaged place caused by disaster. Thus, a set of questions rise: why people come as a tourist to the disaster artifacts? How people make meaning of the disaster artifacts? The paper would examine this question,

taking the visitors of Tsunami Museum and Monument of PLTD Apung as a case of study.

The paper aims to describe the meaning of disaster tourism activities and disaster artifacts constructed by the visitors of Tsunami Museum and Monument of PLTD Apung. The broader purpose of the study is to understand why and how people enjoy the disaster tourism destinations, what kind of factors that shape their decision to come to disaster tourism, and what kind of meanings they construct to their activities. This study would give a very important contribution to the disaster as well as tourism studies, in which the study of disaster tourism is still rare. In the practical level, considering Indonesia as a disaster-prone country, this study is very important to build a more comprehensive understanding of disaster, especially from the cultural contexts.

Method

The paper based on qualitative research done in Tsunami Museum and Monument of PLTD Apung, Nanggroe Atjeh Darussalam, Indonesia. Data are generally obtained through primary ways, from first-hand experience. The field work to collect primary data was conducted in a month in the end of 2015, optimizing in depth interview and observation. The number of informants, who are mainly the visitors, were 25 persons. The informants were chosen on the basis of their origin, namely the local people (Acehnese), the Indonesian, and the foreigner. The author also took documentation in the form of photographs. Secondary data were taken mainly from the government, especially from the tourism department of Aceh province. For interviews, the author used the semi-structured interviews which are more flexible so that informants could give many stories, descriptions, statements (Neumann, 2003).

The author also used qualitative model of data analysis (Neumann, 2003). It started with data reduction, in which author selecting the data obtained, which are relevant and would be analyzed and which other are not. The next step is data categorization into some groups based on the research questions. The next is data presentation in the form of descriptions, tables, graphs, charts, pictograms and others. Lastly is the conclusion which should be able to answer the research problems has been formulated (Moelong, 2005: 288-299).

Theoretical Perspective

This research is closely related to some theoretical keywords, namely disaster tourism, museum, memory and collective remembering. *Disaster tourism is defined as tourism in which tourist can learn the present situation in the disaster area and can support the regional economy by spending money in the local market* (Miller, as cited Nagai 2012: 10). Miller emphasized the positive aspect of disaster tourism, namely educational and economic function. Basically, the function of the museum is a public sphere which are provide benefits such as learning (educational), recreation, and imaginative (Tjahjopurnomo, in Hatomi, 2016: 13). Thus, disaster museum should be a public sphere in which people could learn about disaster and have imagination on certain disaster in the past.

Memory, according to Assmann (2008: 109) is divided into three parts, namely the inner (neuromental), social level and cultural level. The inner level (neuromental) explains that the memory comes from the personal to each individual (neuromental system). While on the social level, the memory comes from a problem of communication and social interaction so that the memory itself can analyze the functions of social life. Memory is essentially derived from the self-representation in the past perceived by group or individual which affect the identity of that group or individual. Memory could be defined as the past experiences that shape collective identity (Corsane, cited in Perdana, 2010: 8).

Collective remembering is also viewed as privileging identity formation and contestation over the sort of objective representation of the past that is the aspiration of historical analysis (Wertsch, 2008: 318-326). Memory is also affected by the identity established by each individual or member of group. Forms of collective memory itself is building, history, monument, museum, and another artifact. Thus, museum can be regarded as the representation of cultural identity.

Result and Discussion

Aceh Tsunami Museum and Monument PLTD Apung are often chosen as family leisure options, group of excursions, as well as educational facilities. As perceived by international visitors, they feel that these tourist destinations give them new experiences and information that they never got before. They are inferred with social level of memory which felt that visiting disaster museums and monuments as similar as a visiting another tourism places (Assmann, 2008).

Otherwise, national or regional visitors are also inferred with social and cultural level of memory, in which they feel that visiting both places are wonderful experiences, because every room and space in the museums could represent the tsunami at that time. They could remember the disaster that they were constantly following the progress day by day through Indonesian mass media which almost all covering intensively the disaster. In contrast to local visitors who are also the witnesses of tsunami, they get the inner or neuromental level of memory (Assmann, 2008). They feel that visiting museum or monument tsunami is not only the practice of remembering, but the practice of praying for the relatives who have been the victims of tsunami, the practice of reflecting self and their society, the practice of mourning. The local people perceived that the museum and monument are not just 'museum', but have more personal meaning.

Table 1. Level of memory perceived by visitors

No	Visitor Type	Inner (Neuromental)	Memory Level	
			Social level	Cultural level
1	Local tourist (the witnesses of tsunami)	√		
2	Regional or national tourist (non-witnesses)		√	√
3	International tourist (non-witnesses)		√	

They are some aspects of visitor receptions, namely emotion, religion, and information. The emotion aspect includes longing, amazed, gripped, fascinated, compassion, upset, and happy. While religion aspect is pilgrimage and gratitude. The information is about curious, knowledge, and education.

Table 2. Aspect of visitor's reception

No.	Aspects of Perception	
1	Emotion	Longing, amazed, gripped, fascinated, compassion, upset, and happy
2	Religion	Pilgrimage and gratitude
3	Information	Curious, knowledge, and education

The table summarizes aspects of visitor receptions when visiting monuments PLTD Apung and Tsunami Museum. Longing means when the local visitors come, they felt longing for relatives who have died because of tsunami. They are certain spots that remind local visitors to the deadly tsunami on 11 years ago. Thus, local people have close relations as well as meanings with particular spots because they have specific personal more memories to the spots. Related to the longing experience, local people feel like doing pilgrimage when visiting museum. In the Museum Tsunami and Monument PLTD Apung, there are specific spot exposing the names of victims of Tsunami, usually called as “well of prayer” and “monument”. With such dark lighting, the local people feel like doing pilgrimage to the grave of their relatives. They will usually pray and silent at those places. With this background, the local people would usually directly visit certain spots, not the whole museum. In the other side, local visitors also feel gratitude, because they can survive from the tsunami.

Outsider visitors, both regional, national and international, also experience variety of feeling at the time of visit. First, visitors would usually feel amazed knowing 2,500 tons of PLTD Apung could be thrown up to the 10 kilometers from the beach. It is unique for visitors, because something like this does not exist anywhere except in Aceh, Indonesia. Second, visitors are charmed by the unique design of the Aceh Tsunami Museum which could symbolically represent the huge and deadly Tsunami at 2004. These outsiders usually take pictures as well as self-pictures.

The visitors would usually feel gripping and dither when entering the alleys of museum which is created as such the wave of tsunami. Feelings of pity and compassion also felt by the visitors when seeing images and videos of the emergency condition of tsunami. Visitors felt sorry for seeing the result of the tsunami disaster that claimed thousands of casualties. Moreover, the visitors also feel compassion and happy when peacefulness rises following Tsunami, after many years of the Aceh conflict.

The research shows that the reception influences visitor behavior. When visitors feel longing, gratitude and remembrance of a memory, they look silent and dreamy. Besides, when visitors mean their visit as a pilgrimage, they will only come to certain spots which expose the names of victims of the tsunami. Furthermore, many visitors, usually the foreigner, will focus on the knowledge they get from the visit. They more enjoy to read any information presented The Indonesian people would also focus on the information, but usually in the context of specific purpose of the visit, such as study tour by junior or senior high school students.

This research confirms Oliver-Smith (1996) who has emphasized that *“Disaster tourism can change its role to suit the survivors’ needs. In Tohoku, it was viewed as an expression by the survivors to grieve, mourn and bid farewell to their deceased and*

missing relatives". The similar phenomena happen in Museum Tsunami and Monument PLTD Apung in which the visitors viewed their coming as pilgrimage, gratitude, longing or mourning. Visitors love to visit the disaster artifact due to certain functions of the visit itself, as well as the perception of their coming. It depends on the background, experience and needs of the visitors. Furthermore, Oliver-Smith (1996) emphasized:

“Disaster tourism as one where tourists can 1) see disaster heritages from which they can witness the gross intensity of the disasters, 2) experience the local treasure which existed before the disaster, 3) appreciate the reconstruction process through observing the state of the residents and the industries, 4) listen to the stories of the survivors, 5) learn something.”

The research shows that the museum and monument are media that allows people to learn, recreation, and remember and forget certain events. Having experience would recall certain memories when viewed a museum or monument (Ullberg, 2014: 1-3). Thus, the meaning of museum or monument determined by experience and memory of each individual or visitor. In this sense, the memory depends on the experience. Thus, the local people would have more meanings because of their proximity, as the witnesses of the tsunami, of each artifact that are presented. In contrast to the visitors who are not witnesses which have social meaning of museums and monuments as a historic or aesthetic place and to get certain knowledge about disaster events in the past.

Conclusion

The study finds that the meanings of coming to the disaster tourism destinations differ in a wide range of meaning-construction. They could be categorized into three core meanings, namely religious, emotive, and education – information meanings. The meanings are closely related to the origin of the informants. The Acehnese usually construct religious and individual-memory meanings, by which they make sense of disaster tourism as a pilgrimage activity, as a gratefulness to the God as they were not being victims of Tsunami, or as remembering their relatives who became the victims. Thus, the Acehnese or the outsider, who are deeply related to the place or having direct experience to the Tsunami, construct the meaning of their activities as remembering activities, which they take the inner (neuromental) level of memory.

While the Indonesian and foreigner who do not have firsthand experience to the disaster generally construct the social or cultural level of memory, which are related to the collective memory of the Tsunami that attack the place at the end of 2004. The Indonesian generally take the emotive meaning, such as compassioned, terrified, and astonished. While, the foreigner usually interprets their activities as gathering information and educating themselves. The meanings also affect the behavior of the visitors. The Acehnese often seen praying at a certain spot of the Tsunami Museum, shedding tears, and gazing wistfully. The Indonesian also often seen shedding tears, but they are most often taking selfie pictures. Otherwise, the foreigner is interested in the displayed information and reading them carefully.

The construction of meaning, as mentioned beforehand, are closely related to the origin of the visitors, but it is actually determined by the direct experience to the disaster. The study finds that the Indonesian who are not Acehnese but having firsthand experience to the Tsunami, such as becoming volunteer, construct individual-memory meaning of their coming to the disaster tourism place. Similar to the Acehnese visitors, they also often seen praying, shedding tears, and understanding their activities as remembering actions. To conclude, the study confirms some previous studies who has emphasized that disaster tourism could have different role and change its role to suit the visitor's needs.

Notes on contributor

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