

Remembering the Disaster: Isra Miraj Commemoration at the Telomoyo Slope Inscription Site during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Isra Miraj is a commemoration of the amazing journey of the Prophet Muhammad PBUH to the seventh heaven in one night. In Indonesia, this day is celebrated by various traditions, including *rejeban* in Java. Some activities such as *bersih desa* (cleaning the village) ceremony, eating together in haunted or ancestral burial places, and performing various artistic performances are held in *rejeban*. By applying oral tradition methodology suggested by Jan Vansina (1964), this paper aims to propose that *rejeban* on the Telomoyo slope is more than a commemoration of Isra Miraj resulted from Islamic-Javanese acculturation. This tradition is a medium inheriting the collective memory of natural disasters in the XIX century. In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, *rejeban* is a reminder of local disasters occurred globally.

Keywords: *Isra Miraj, Rejeban, Oral Tradition, Disaster Memory, Pandemic*

Abstrak

Isra Miraj adalah peringatan tentang perjalanan menakjubkan Nabi Muhammad ke langit ketujuh dalam satu malam. Di Indonesia, hari raya ini diperingati melalui berbagai tradisi. Salah satunya adalah tradisi *rejeban* di Jawa. Kegiatan ini diselenggarakan dalam bentuk upacara bersih desa, makan bersama di tempat-tempat angker atau pusat persemayaman roh nenek moyang, serta pementasan ragam pertunjukkan kesenian. Mengaplikasikan metodologi tradisi lisan Jan Vansina (1964) di Lereng Telomoyo, tulisan ini mencoba mengajukan pendapat bahwa tradisi *rejeban* di Lereng Telomoyo lebih dari perayaan Isra Miraj hasil akulturasi Islam-Jawa. Tradisi ini adalah media pewarisan memori kolektif tentang bencana alam di abad XIX. Dalam konteks pandemi Covid-19, *rejeban* menjadi pengingat bencana lokal dalam bencana baru yang terjadi secara global.

Kata kunci: *isra miraj, rejeban, tradisi lisan, memori bencana alam, pandemi*

INTRODUCTION

Isra Miraj is an Islamic celebration to remember the amazing journey done by Prophet Muhammad on 26 Rajab 621 AD. His journey begun at Masjidil Haram to Masjidil Aqsa and then Sidratul Muntaha or the seventh heaven. In this journey, Prophet Muhammad is believed to meet other prophets, see heaven and hell, and have conversations with Allah resulting reduction in the number of daily prayers from fifty to five.¹

In Indonesia, there are several ways in celebrating Isra Miraj including organizing sermon, reading *kitab kuning*, visiting graves, distributing food, arranging feast together, and performing arts performances.² Moreover, these activities, in villages in Java, is well-known as *rejeban*.³ The term *rejeban* refers to activities done In *Rejeb* or *Rajab* (the seventh month in the Hijri calendar). The main activity in this month is cleaning the village, especially the cemetery, *punden*, and sacred places. On there, the villagers slaughter animal (goat), offers crops and offerings, and etas together for expressing gratitude and asking for salvation.⁴ The activities mentioned are encounter between Islam and the culture of Nusantara. This encounter also opens a space for balance, dialogue, and appreciation towards the local traditions.⁵ Besides, the prayers held on those places depict a symbol to imitate Prophet Muhammad towards previous prophets and create a harmony between the earth and the sky.⁶

¹ S. O'Meara, "The Space Between Here and There: The Prophet's Night Journey as an Allegory of Islamic Ritual Prayer," *Middle Eastern Literatures*, Vol 15(No. 3), (2012), 233; A. Zakaria, "Studi Analisis Peristiwa Isra Miraj Nabi Muhammad Menurut Al Quran dan Hadits," *Al Tababbur: Jurnal Ilmu Alquran dan Tafsir*, Vol 4, (2019) 104; G. M. Azad, "Isra and Miraj: Night Journey and Ascension of Allah's Apostle Muhammad (s.a.w)," *Islamic Studies*, 22, 63-80; 91983); R. Fitria, "Tradisi Kirab dan Makan Bersama untuk Peringati Hari Isra Miraj," (Detik.com, 2021); T. R. Alfiahsyah, "Apa Itu Isra Miraj Berikut Ini Tradisi Peringatannya di Indonesia," (Kompas.com, 2022).

² A. Efizuddin, "Tradisi Rejeban Pablengan," (Mediaindonesia.com, 2022); D. Widiyanto, "Tradisi Unik Pablengan Sedot Perhatian Wistawan," (KR.com, 2022); I. Reza, "Tradisi Unik Isra Miraj di Indonesia," (Popbela.com, 2022); F. Nabilla, "Tradisi Isra Miraj di Indonesia Agamis dan Kental Akan Kearifan Lokal," (Suara.com, 2022); A. Rifki, "Isra Miraj Baca Kitab Kuning Arab Pegon Arja Syafaat Karanganyar K.H. Ahmad Rifai Aljawi Wujud Islam Nusantara," (Merdeka.com, 2022).

³ S. Munawaroh & S. Christiyati Ariani, *Etnografi Masyarakat Samin di Bojonegoro*. (Yogyakarta: BPNB DIY, 2015), 121; B. Sri, E. Hendar, & P. Veronika, *Mengembangkan Kompetensi Komunikasi Antarbudaya berbasis Kearifan Lokal untuk Membangun Keharmonisan Relasi Antar Etnis dan Agama*, (Ponorogo: Buatbuku.com, 2021); N. Syam, *Islam Pesisir*, (Yogyakarta: LkiS, 2015), 168; M. Alkaf, A. Purwasito, I.N. Murtana, & W. Abdullah, "Nyuwun Slamet; Local Wisdom of Javanese Rural People in Dealing With Covid-19 Pandemic Through Request in Slametan Rite," *Javanologi: International Journal of Javanese Studies Vol. IV(2)*, (2021).

⁴ V. Dimiyati, "Mengenai Eksotisme Dusun Cepit yang Tersembunyi di Lereng Gunung Sumbing," (Inews.id, 2022); S.W. Nugroho, "Warga Jatimulyo Gelar Upacara Adat Rejeban," (Tribunjogja.com, 2022); Alkaf, et.al, *ibid*.

⁵ Sri, Hendar, & Veronika, *ibid*; R. Tohopi, "Perayaan Isra Miraj dalam Budaya Masyarakat Gorontalo," *El Harakah*, Vol. 14(No. 1), (2012).

⁶ M.R. Chamamai, "Isra Miraj dalam Kajian Kitab Ulama Nusantara," (nu.or.id, 2016).

Celebrating Isra Miraj in *rejeban* tradition is also found on the Mount Telomoyo's slopes, Semarang Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. Covid-19 pandemic has made this celebration simple. In the midst of the simplicity, *rejeban* in Ngrawan village, Getasan district on *Jumat Legi* become special. First, *rejeban* was held in Ngrawan Inscription, not at cemeteries, *punden*, or other places. In the local language, an inscription is called *batur* since it is a *baturan* (a house foundation) buried for the landslide. Second, *rejeban* was followed by a joint food event at the inscription site. This activity was held again after twenty years of absence. Besides, although Ngrawan village consists of five hamlets (Ngrawan, Tanon, Padhan, Ploso, and Tegalsari), the tradition of eating together is only done by Ngrawan hamlet. Third, in the last twenty years, *rejeban* in Ngrawan village was only carried out by slaughtering female goat and praying together on a limited scale. However, *rejeban* on March 5th, 2022 brought back the lost tradition, eating together

In addition, there is a *gecul* mask art performance in *rejeban* in Ngrawan village. It is a new dance from Kridha Mudha Tamtama community in Ngrawan hamlet. In this performance, there are various characters as a diversity and harmonious symbol of villagers in Ngrawan hamlet when they dealt with the disaster that buried their village.

Moreover, *rejeban* in Ngrawan Inscription is also accompanied by prayers to the *danyang* of the village (Bambang Irawan) who guarded the village, and to the people, as a narration of gratitude to the people of Tanon and Padhan, who gave them new land after the disaster. Their gratitude was expressed by performing arts from five community in Ngrawan village after the event at the Inscription.



Figure 1. Celebrating Isra Miraj in Ngrawan village

Source: Omah Cikal (2021)

Based on the description above, it can be formulated that *rejeban* in Ngrawan Inscription is related to the myth of natural disasters. However, there is no written source regarding to the natural disasters about Ngrawan village and Mount Telomoyo in general. Moreover, information related to Telomoyo as a volcano and disaster mitigation in this area was emerged in October 2021.⁷ On the other hand, *rejeban* at Ngrawan Inscription was only carried out by the Ngrawan hamlet. Therefore, this paper tries to discuss the construction and transformation of collective memory in *rejeban* for celebrating Isra Miraj in Ngrawan village.

⁷ H. Susilo, "Gempa Bumi yang Mengguncang Ambarawa Salatiga Berpusat di Gunung Telomoyo Pertanda Akan Meletus," (Solopos.com, 2021); R.D. Saptoyo, "Mengenal Gunung Telomoyo yang Jadi Pusat Sesar Rentetan Gempa Salatiga," (Kompas.com, 2021); Y. Makdori, "Wilayah Salatiga Rawan Gempa Akibat Sesar Aktif, BMKG Ingatkan Edukasi Mitigasi Bencana," (Liputan6.com, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

Jan Vansina's⁸ methodology in Africa become this paper's reference. This is based on the consideration that Ngrawan villagers is a speech community, so they do not have written evidence of natural disasters in their surroundings. On the other hand, the study of Ngrawan villager, specifically *rejeban*, can be a way to reject Western hegemony about the absence of history without written evidence. Therefore, this paper become a media providing equality for Ngrawan villagers as historical owners.

The Vansina oral tradition methodology, in practice, is carried out by implementing the oral history's principles.⁹ Thus, the data in this study, in the majority, are interviews and myths collected during 5 October 2021 – 5 March 2022. Moreover, the way the researcher collecting information was developed from Vansina's Chapter II about performances, traditions, and texts.¹⁰ At first, this research was carried out by classifying *rejeban* into two, *rejeban* celebration and *rejeban* tradition. Determining items for each classification became the next step. As a celebration, collecting data of *rejeban* focused on activities and the actors or the participants. The activities mentioned include standardized and modified story about *rejeban*, practices, body language, and any information about the celebration. In addition, the researcher collected the traditions' item of *rejeban* including the activities' frequency (time and location), the activity's purpose (messages and possible message modification), memories, mnemotechnical tools (objects, landscapes, and music), as well as learning aspects (sources, time, method, rules, and taboos).

The above items are identified and described. The description's result, then, were criticized with comparison sources in the form of interviews and documentation of village activities in previous years, as well as research notes during October 2021 – March 2022¹¹.

⁸ J. Vansina, *Tradisi Lisan sebagai Sejarah*, (Yogyakarta: Ombak, 2014).

⁹ B. Purwanto, "Belajar dari Afrika: Tradisi Lisan sebagai Sejarah dan Upaya Membangun Historiografi Bagi Mereka yang Terabaikan," dalam In J. Vansina, *ibid*, xxxv).

¹⁰ J. Vansina, *ibid*, 51-105.

¹¹ This research is a part of Hibah Riset Keilmuan Bina Desa 2022 funded by Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, Riset, dan Teknologi Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi.

DISCUSSION

Memory Construction

Ngrawan village is located in Getasan district, Semarang regency, Central Java. As the smallest village in Getasan district, this village is 182.02 Ha with 114.33 Ha dry land/fields, 20.34 Ha paddy fields, 42.59 Ha residential land, and 5.56 Ha crooked land. This village has five hamlets, namely Ngrawan, Tanon, Padhan, Ploso, and Tegalsari (Ngrawan, 2021).

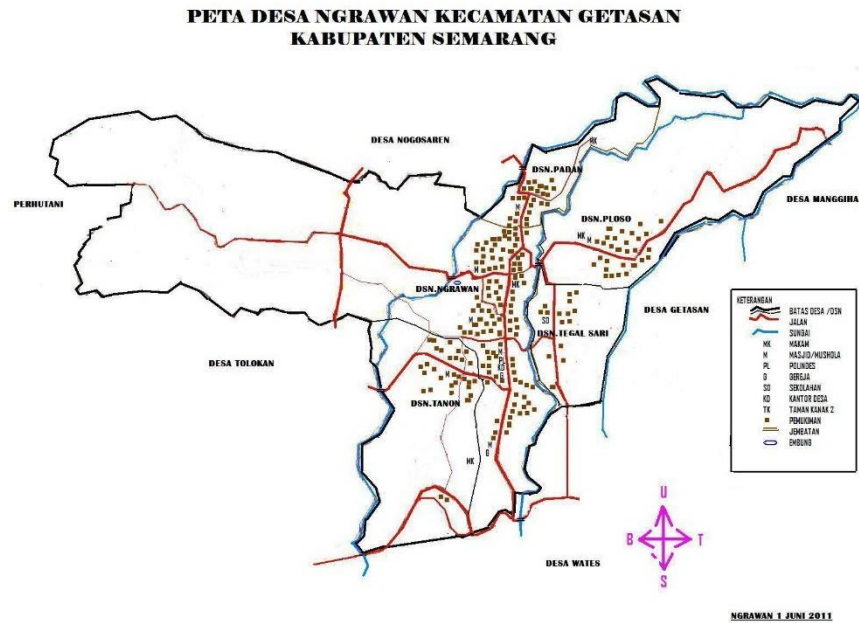


Figure 2. Map of Ngrawan village

Source: Ngrawan village government (2021)

Ngrawan hamlet is the largest hamlet in Ngrawan village. The area has 113.12 Ha. It includes ten neighbourhoods and 350 families. Its name refers to *danyang* of the village named Bambang Irawan. Thus, the name Ngrawan is intended as a place of descent for Bambang Irawan's descendants. In local belief, it is described as a soft-spoken, handsome, large, and tall man wearing a *gadhung mlathi* headband (a green-patterned tie). His figure appeared in the village especially the morning before anyone died. He can be met by people who are able to pray three days and three nights without sleeping, eating, and drinking.

Table 1. Hamlets in Ngrawan and its area

Source: Ngrawan village government (2021)

No.	Hamlet	Area (Ha)	Neighbourhoods
1.	Ngrawan	113,12	10
2.	Tanon	23,21	2
3.	Padan	11,14	2
4.	Ploso	19,44	2
5.	Tegalsari	15,11	1
Total		182,02	17

According to the myth, Ngrawan hamlet was originally located in Baturan area (Ngrawan Inscription). A landslide made it moved to the former Padhan hamlet. The disaster is believed as a punishment form Ngrawan villagers who do not respect and treat others badly. The story began with the *danyang* of the village who was angry to the villagers. He transformed into a poor Chinese merchant who dressed badly and looked tobacco in Ngrawan village. The villagers did not want to sell their tobacco and even made fun of him. They assumed that he would not able to afford the tobacco. The joke made the merchant hurt. He said that Ngrawan villager had been wrong in judging others by its cover. Therefore, on *Senin wage* at 04.00 p.m. he killed all of Ngrawan villagers. Those words were accompanied by thunder and followed by a landslide. As a result, Ngrawan villager fled to the Padhan (starting from Balong). They shifted Padhan villager, who were only seven families, to the corner of the village (*Padhan* means corner) and used Tanon to survive.

The myth about the landslides is present in people's daily lives. It is not only present in conversations if there are guests from universities or tourists, but also in the identity of the arts community. Ngrawan Village is a village on the Mount Telomoyo's slopes which is closely related to local arts. The villagers identify themselves as farmers-dancers. They join five arts community, namely Reog Ngurawan, Kridha Muda Tamtama, Rodatin Wahyu Ilahi, (Ngrawan Hamlet), Kridha Budi Utomo (Tanon), and Kridha Mudha Pertiwi (Padhan). The first three community have feature dances originating from stories of inscriptions and landslides, while the last two community narrate the two stories positioning themselves as a part of Ngrawan village.

The myths are also present in village landscapes. In addition to marking territorial boundaries, this knowledge of the village landscape is present when paying taxes or when among fellow farmer-dancers referring activities in the fields as work in the office. For the Tanon villager, the landslides of Ngrawan and the displacement of the Ngrawan villager in the past made their village narrow and no longer had the *bengkok*. However, the tax letter C of the Ngrawan hamlet still mentions the ownership of Tanon's land. Meanwhile, for Padhan villager, the village landscapes is embedded in their daily lives to remind the Ngrawan people not to reach for their *rempela* or gizzards since they gave their hearts to the Ngrawan people in the past. This is in accordance with the Javanese proverb, "*wis diwenehi ati, aja ngrogoh rempela*".



Figure 3. Familiarizing the village landscape

Source: personal documentation

The information of village landscape is not only owned by the elders, but also the children. An expedition entitled "Jelajah Rempah" was even designed on 5 February 2022 to confirm the collective memory of the landslides and the displacement of Ngrawan village. As a result, the identity of the hamlet's refugee became one of the foundations for forming a group of the fifth graders of elementary school.

Transformation

The myth of disaster and landslide that are present in everyday life and arts create anxiety among teenager of Ngrawan village. Those who joined Sanggar Omah Cikal association sued the elders as they left them only attractions and traditions without philosophy. Therefore, they initiated a program for writing art history Panca Budaya.¹² This program, for the first time, made the elders, parents, teenagers, and children meet in a place discussing village history based on five art communities' viewpoints from three Ngrawan village.

This activity resulted some keywords including *baturan*, disasters, cina, and office as a toponym to name the colonial coffee plantation area. Based on the keywords, Pemuda Omah Cikal asked the researcher from village-grant program who are inventing children's game to prevent Covid-19 to teach them how to trace village historical sources. The pandemic limits access to archive offices and libraries. Therefore, they rely on the colonial electronic newspaper on *delpher.nl* page.

The effort paid off. The story about landslide and the displacement of Ngrawan is not just a myth. Ngrawan is a fertile and prosperous area. Based on the colonial records, this area was inhabited by at least 350 Javanese in 1869. The people's job is farming and working in Dutch coffee plantations. Moreover, they also work on their own coffee plantation.

This landslide occurred on *Kamis Kliwon Wuku Bala* or 8 April 1880. It was begun with an earthquake accompanied by continuous heavy rain in the Mount Telomoyo area. In the afternoon before the landslide, it was told that the village, including tobacco and coffee plantations, was filled with a tense atmosphere. Dense fog descended as well as over a hundred deer. They, which lived in Telomoyo, run down accompanied by a high screeching sound. The landslide was reported causing relatively large losses. Six hundred coffee trees in this village were reported damaged. Meanwhile, a hundred villagers were injured and the village was razed to the ground. The other villagers were evacuated to a flatter place. The location is a quarter of a *pal* (in Java, 1 pal is equivalent to 1.507). In addition, the first village head after moving was Hardjodikoro¹³.

Tracing the Colonial history is also followed by reading the year of the inscriptions. The inscription that is unknown came from 1372 Saka or 1450 AD. However, there is no

¹² This name refers to five arts in Ngrawan village

¹³ Anonym, "Salatiga," *Java-bode: nieuws, handels- en advertentieblad voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, (24 October 1880); Anonym, *Uit Salatiga, "Soerabaiasch Handelblad*, (14 October 1880).

further information about it. On the other hand, this activity also encourages the next activity. Those mean sharing this knowledge and reconstructing together oral stories that were previously considered only as myths. In practice, these activities creates a re-appreciation of the inscription as a symbol for reminding past mistakes and the glue of harmony, especially between the three hamlets in Ngrawan village (Ngrawan, Tanon, and Padhan). Therefore, Nyadran Batur, the *rejeban* event in Ngrawan Hamlet to celebrate Isra Miraj, was redesigned to present these two intentions.

The redesign is done by bringing back *Methukan* that have been lost in the last twenty years. *Methukan* is eating together or having a feast. *Methukan* means pick-up or encounter. This is interpreted as an encounter with three elements, namely an encounter between fellow villagers, an encounter with ancestral spirits and *danyang* of the village, as well as an encounter between humans and their creators. An understanding of the new history makes *Methukan* reconstructed into an encounter with three new insights. First, the meeting of fellow villagers is intended to remind them not to look at people from the outside, so that they will not be punished like their ancestors. Furthermore, this meeting is also to uphold harmony and cooperation as their ancestors did when they fled and rebuild new villages in Padhan and Tanon. Second, the encounter is with the ancestral spirits and *danyang* of the village who maintain the safety of the village in the new village. Third, spiritual encounter is with the creator to remind the duties of *kamanungsan* (humanity).

In addition, in order to complete the encounter, the villagers held an art performance. This performance shows the arts from the Panca Budaya arts community in Ngrawan Village. This also celebrates the anniversary of the *gecul mask* dance containing a message about cooperation (*akur*). This is in accordance with the message "sayuk rukun, rukun karo kancane" in the performance. Furthermore, Omah Cikal distributed *bakul* (basket) to 350 families. The basket will be brought in the *rejeban* in the inscription.

Rejeban took place on *Jumat Legi*. No one can explain why this time was chosen. Tradition, is the only reason. The event starts with slaughtering female goats at the Ngrawan inscription at 06.00. The female goat is a symbol of fertility. If there is a child in it, the village people will be blessed with blessings in the form of a bountiful harvest.



Figure 4. Cooking the goat

Source: personal documentation

The twenty-year-gap made the goat cooking run into problems. If in twenty years the slaughtered goats were immediately cooked after being cleaned and seasoned, now they have to think about how to distribute it among those who are present. The difficulty of brought back memories of the disasters, changes in the village landscape, and the purpose of *rejeban* which is different from the previous year. Meanwhile, the inscription is covered with *mori* cloth. There are various offerings around the inscription. The most important offering is white porridge in the four corners and red porridge in the middle. This offering is important for symbolizing the concept of *saka papat lima pancer* or the four corners of the wind and the five centers. This carries the message to always focus on the creator.

Panic broke out at 09.30. The meat is not yet cooked well, while the sound of *gamelan* from the village about a kilometre away started playing. The elders were in the inscription and had changed their clothes. Seeing the conditions, they discussed and resulted that the most important thing in this event was to glorify the Prophet Muhammad and just like the prophet who visited the previous prophets. Moreover, according to them, the purpose of this event is to meet the ancestors and give thanks for disaster safety.



Figure 5. *Rejeban* in Ngrawan Inscription Site

Source: personal documentation

At 10:00 sharp, the procession of residents of Dusun Ngrawan began to enter the site of the inscription. This activity was not only followed by Muslim villagers, but all villagers. Confusion arose again since the site was unable to accommodate all villagers. In fact, in one week, it had been expanded since the surrounding lands had been donated to the village. After the situation can be resolved, *rejeban* event began. Different from the previous year, for the first time, it was opened with the reading of the history of the village as a result of research by the teenager of Omah Cikal.

After a speech from the village head, the event began with a prayer and an explanation of the history of the landslide by the elders. On this occasion, the elders also repeated the concept of *sedulur papat lima pancer* in the daily activities. The event continued with prayers and the reading of safety prayers followed by Al fatikah three times.

Furthermore, the event was carried out by cleaning various gamelan equipment and then followed by eating together.

CONCLUSION

From the descriptions above, it can be concluded that the Ngrawan Inscription is one of the memorial sites on Mount Telomoyo's slopes. Borrowing Pierre Nora's term, it is where a group of people engage in public activities, expressing collective shared knowledge from the past, which forms the basis of a community's sense of unity and individuality. The communities that visit these sites are people who have inherited the previous meanings attached to the event, and have added new meanings¹⁴.

In the context of *rejeban* tradition to commemorate Isra Miraj, the Ngrawan inscription, whose history is unknown, functions as a place of collective knowledge from the past. However, this collective knowledge is not about knowledge of the story of Isra and Miraj of the Prophet Muhammad or knowledge of Islamic-Javanese acculturation but knowledge of disasters on Mount Telomoyo's slopes. Furthermore, *rejeban* event was only attended by residents of Ngrawan Hamlet because they were the main owners of this event. Therefore, coming to the *rejeban* event is not only carrying out the tradition of *methukan* with ancestors and the creator but also strengthening the sense of identity, unity, harmony, and cooperation between refugees. The new format of the *rejeban* event added new meanings that did not exist in the last twenty years or previous periods.

Finally, the study of *rejeban* in the Ngrawan Village Inscription is an alternative discussion on Islamic holidays. In addition, the study of these holidays is expected to provide a new perspective in understanding natural disaster mitigation on Mount Telomoyo's slopes and enrich the study of historical writing and community. Furthermore, this study also refutes Jay Winter's opinion that the modern period allows most memorial sites to be embedded in events that are specifically marked and separate from the religious calendar. The case study in Ngrawan clearly shows that memorial sites in the modern period are geographically embedded and intertwined with the religious calendar.

The case study in Ngrawan is also an example of how the village is globally connected, especially in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. On one hand, rapid transmission

¹⁴ J. Winter, "Sites of Memory," in S. Radstone, & B. Schwarz, *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, (New York: Fordham University, 2020).

and poor prognosis prompted the enforcement of community activity restrictions (PPKM) in Ngrawan. On the other hand, the Covid-19 pandemic has also become part of the reproduction of new memory in the village memorial site. In other words, *rejeban* in the context of Ngrawan is also a reminder of local disasters in this new disaster that is happening globally.

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