



RELIGIOUS ISSUES IN THE 1883 KRAKATOA DISASTER AND TSUNAMI IN COASTAL BANTEN 2018: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

Iim Imadudin¹ & Lia Nuralia²

^{1,2}Research Center for Prehistoric and Historical Archaeology,
National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN)

Correspondence Email: imadudin1975@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The 1883 Krakatoa eruption and the 2018 tsunami that hit the coast of Banten and Lampung are among the most memorable disasters in Indonesian history. One occurred during the colonial period when technology had not yet reached the sophistication it has today, and the other when technology was very advanced. This research aimed to see what religious issues developed in the 1883 Krakatoa eruption and the 2018 tsunami. The historical method of heuristic, criticism, interpretation, and historiography is employed in this study. Through a literature review, the data was gathered. Through three methods—genetic, historical parallelism, and comparative—the past and present are linked.. The approach in this research compares the similarities and differences related to religious issues related to disasters in two different periods and events. Religious issues, given those who believe in them, play an essential role in the causes and effects of disasters. Religious issues that can be read in these two events range from forms of religious fanaticism to religious sentiment. Understanding religious issues related to disasters from a local perspective will help plan disaster mitigation appropriately amidst the short memories of communities in disaster-prone areas.

Keywords: Religious issues; Krakatoa eruption; Banten coastal tsunami

1. INTRODUCTION

Banten has a long history of disasters. Nguyen et al. (2015) mentioned that Banten and other areas, such as Lampung and Batavia, were hit by a severe earthquake in 1699. The severe shaking caused casualties and damaged buildings, houses, and barns. It is not confident which region was the source of the earthquake, but it is estimated to have been between Cisalak and Lampung. It is considered the most significant historical earthquake in the 17th century (Sururoh et al., 2020).

The Krakatoa eruption in 1883 was the next major disaster that altered world history. Krakatoa's activity resulted in a tsunami wave 41 meters high. The death toll surpassed 36,000 people. The Banten and Lampung regions were devastated. The effect was felt in other parts of the world as well. The Krakatoa eruption became one of the largest in recorded history (Jayasuriya & McCawley, 2010).

The last disaster that struck Banten occurred on December 22, 2018. The tsunami caused by Mount Anak Krakatoa's eruption struck the Banten coast again. A total of 437 people died, 14,059 people were injured, 16 were missing, and 33,721 were displaced. The Sunda Strait tsunami occurred due to an avalanche caused by the volcanic activity of Anak Krakatoa. The avalanche event that occurred during the full moon caused high tide conditions. The combination of avalanches and high tide caused a tsunami that hit the west coast of Banten (Sururoh, 2020).

Disasters have caused material losses and deaths. However, post-disaster social care is equally important. Efforts to evacuate victims also coincide with mental strengthening due to the emergence of solid trauma. In the long term, it is necessary to prepare disaster mitigation that can prevent more casualties. One dimension that often goes unnoticed when discussing disasters is religious issues. Religious issues that surround disasters will become a perspective in understanding disasters. In the context of Banten's religious society, it is interesting to connect religious issues with the occurrence of disasters. What religious issues mean in the context of disaster events are sociological facts related to attitudes and actions based on religious beliefs.

Issues are often understood as something negative: rumors, gossip, and so forth. In literary interpretation, an issue is still being debated, resulting in differing opinions among people or groups. Jones (1977) defines issues as 'controversial public problems' triggered by differences in perception, interest, and even interests. It could be that specific social symptoms are considered problems by certain groups, while they are not for other groups (Sudiyono, 2006).

Thus, religious issues are associated with emerging religious expressions based on religious values in understanding a disaster. Religious issues are closely related to disaster theology. Disaster theology is a concept based on spiritual teachings that can be used as a theological basis for dealing with disasters. Mustaqim (2015) defines a new approach to understanding disaster theology. Disaster

theology is not only a set of concepts and beliefs related to divine issues but is more related to humanitarian issues on how to view and respond to disasters.

Comparing religious issues in two different disaster contexts is interesting. The 1883 Krakatoa eruption occurred when technology was less advanced and in an atmosphere of colonialism. Meanwhile, the 2018 tsunami took place when technology was very advanced, and the atmosphere of the Indonesian Republic government was favorable. The author assumes that there will be similarities and differences related to religious issues that arise during the two events' pre-, ongoing, and post-disaster periods.

Comparative studies are rarely conducted in the context of disaster. However, several researchers have mentioned the relevance between religion and tragedy. Mustaqim (2015) reviewed disaster theology from the perspective of the Quran. Khan (2021) discusses the role of religious insight in disaster management. Ha (2015) investigated the role of religious beliefs and institutions in Korean disaster management. Tantri (2014) connected the Krakatoa disaster with the religious awakening of Banten residents, which triggered acts of resistance against the colonials. Hakim (1981) linked the disaster to religious fanaticism.

This article aims to uncover emerging religious issues and provide a contextual analysis of disasters. This is intended to foster disaster literacy and make religion an important factor in disaster mitigation. In a broader context, Indonesia's location in the "Ring of Fire," a nation with active faults and volcanoes in every region, requires the creation of a disaster mitigation program that incorporates not only economic, political, or social approaches but also religious approaches that can serve as a source of inspiration for solving disaster-related issues.

2) METHODS

This research used the historical methods of heuristics, criticism, interpretation, and historiography. The historical method is defined by Gilbert J. Garraghan (1957: 33) as a systematic set of rules and principles for collecting historical sources effectively, assessing them critically, and presenting a synthesis of the results used in written form. Data collection was done through a literature study. Writing materials are sourced from research that the author has published. Data enrichment is done by searching for sources in libraries and on the internet. The written sources

were printed official sources, documents, books, and others. From the internet, the author obtained journal publications and news from the mass media, especially from more contemporary sources.

3) RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The 1883 Krakatoa Eruption and Its Impacts

In 1883, a massive tsunami occurred in the Sunda Strait, triggered by the eruption of the Krakatoa volcano. Signs of an impending disaster were not apparent in the first months of 1883. The observatory in Batavia recorded small earthquakes in some areas, but these were not seen as alarming. Life went on as usual. The coming of the disaster became apparent when the Perbuwatan crater emitted volcanic ash and water vapor 11 kilometers into the air on May 20, 1883. However, the eruption stopped on its own (Imadudin, 2009).

Disaster struck four months later. It spewed ash, pumice, hot mudstone, and sand for three consecutive days. It hit the Sunda Strait islands and the southern tip of Sumatra, and the north and northwest of Java. As far as the eye could see, the coastal areas of Banten became a desert (Arsipnas, 2003).



Figure 1. The surroundings of Krakatoa before its eruption in 1883
(Source: <https://indearchipel.com/2018/03/22/Krakatoa-1-eerste-berichtgeving>)

Krakatoa's explosion for three days shook the sea. Loud explosions were heard throughout the archipelago, even as far away as Singapore, Australia, the Philippines, Japan, and the island of Rodrigues near Mauritius. High tides wiped out the towns of Teluk Betung in Lampung, Anyer, and

Caringin in Banten. On the east coast of Sumatra, the tidal wave reached the Tulang Bawang estuary. While on the west coast, it reached Air Bangis on the north coast of West Sumatra.

Overseas newspapers reported that the fine ash spewed into the air to a height of 30 kilometers was a beautiful sight. The ash plume in the European skies changed colors in the morning. For several days, the sun in Tokyo was copper red, while in America, the sun was yellow with a green halo in the sky. In Hong Kong, the sun suddenly turned green, and in Surabaya, the sun turned green at sunset (Arsipnas, 2003).

The Resident of Banten sent a telegram to the Governor-General reporting on the eruption of Krakatoa and its aftermath. The entire Merak to Caringin area was devastated. Victims had fallen: 40 in Serang District, 80 in Merak, 52 in Banjarnegara, 450 in Caringin, 1517 in Anyer, and 54 in Citeureup. It is thought that the unaccounted-for bodies were swept away by the waves into the open sea. The recorded eruption victims are estimated to have reached 36,417 people (Arsipnas, 2003; Solihudin et al., 2020).

The 2018 Banten Coastal Tsunami and Its Impacts

A few months before the tsunami in Banten, Mount Anak Krakatoa began to show increased volcanic activity. December 21, 2018, eruption lasted 2 minutes and spewed volcanic ash up to 400 meters (1300 feet). On December 22, 2018, a tsunami occurred in the Sunda Strait with a height of 338 m (110 ft) above sea level. The tidal wave was caused by material collapse from Mount Anak Krakatoa. BMKG verified that the tsunami did occur at around 21.30 WIB, along with high wave conditions due to the full moon in the Sunda Strait on December 21–25, 2021 (Andini, 2021). The cause of the disaster is still controversial today. At least three theories can cause tsunamis (tsunamigenic), namely tectonic earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and mass avalanches (Fauzi et al., 2020).

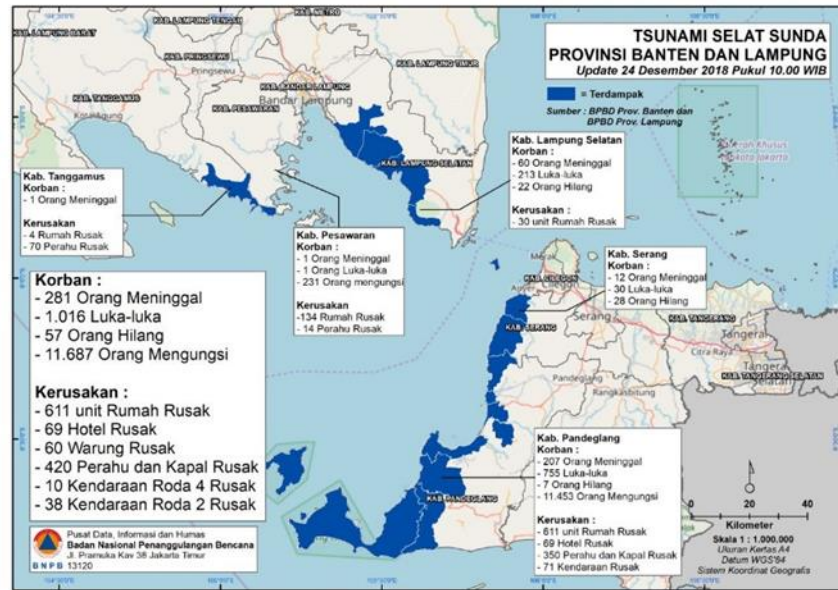


Figure 2. Sunda Strait Tsunami affected 2018
(Source: BNPB, 2018)

The Sunda Strait tsunami of December 22, 2018, hit the coasts of Banten and Lampung provinces. The tsunami affected five regencies: Serang Regency, Pandeglang Regency, South Lampung Regency, Pesawaran Regency, and Tanggamus Regency. Of the several districts hit by the tsunami disaster, the area most severely affected was Pandeglang District (Sutarman et al., 2019).

The National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB) recorded, as of December 25, 2018, the number of people killed by the Banten tsunami. Pandeglang Regency 290 people, South Lampung Regency 108 people, and Serang Regency 29 people. Overall more than 430 people dead, as well as damaging infrastructure, where the most severe damage occurred in Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province (Solihudin et al., 2020).

Disasters and Religious Issues

From Fanaticism to Social Movement

The religious issue that emerged during the 1883 Krakatoa disaster was that the disaster was a punishment from God. *Soerabaijasch Handelsblad*, in 1883 reported that the eruption of Krakatoa increased the hatred of the indigenous population towards the Dutch. The natives saw the disaster as God's punishment against the Dutch for the Aceh War (1873-1914). In *Lokomotif*, September 22, 1883 it was stated: “Ook hier wordt door de onverdraagzame Mahomedanen aan een straf des Hemels gedacht voor het beoorlogten van Atjeh, en eenige Arabieren wilden niets geven ten behoeve

van de noodlijdenden (Here, too, the fanatical Mahommandans think of punishment from Heaven for fighting in Aceh, and some Arabs are unwilling to give anything for the benefit of those in need)” (Bosnak & Honings, 2020).

The punishment from God was imposed because the ruler had acted arbitrarily (Hakim, 1981: 106). The Dutch had oppressed the small people, committed acts of violence against the Acehnese Muslim community, ignored Islamic law and were a punishment for the Dutch who occupied and controlled a house of worship of the grand mosque in Kutaraja (Lapian, 1987: 219). The disaster was also a rebuke to activities or events not aligned with religious law, such as a wedding performance with *ronggeng* dance entertainment (Lapian, 1987: 221).

When disasters are interpreted as punishment, doom, or rebuke, there is a violation of religious values. Deviations in the behavior of individuals or some people result in collective punishment of the community that houses the perpetrators who deviate from moral and ethical norms (Lapian, 1987: 212). The catastrophic event is interpreted as an answer to the dire situation at the time, represented by the anger of nature and the movement of God's 'hand' against injustice in the form of Dutch colonizers.

The eruption of Krakatoa, the high waves of the tsunami, sudden climate change, crop failure, famine, and disease raised the spiritual awareness of the population. There was an explosion of religious feelings aroused by fear without any ill feelings or hostility (van Duijn, 2012). Mosques were filled with worshipers. The Krakatoa disaster brought the population closer to religion. People became more fanatical. There was a strong belief that worse things would happen if religious teachings were not practiced correctly. On the other hand, Banten's mystically religious population had faith and confidence that they could repel the infidel invaders. Leaders or elites invited the masses to participate in a *sabil* war against the Dutch colonialists.

People believed that the eruption of Mount Krakatoa was a sign of the apocalypse and the coming of Imam Mahdi. The devastating natural environment, the casualties, and the economic downturn due to crop failure and the spread of disease made the frustrated community believe that the savior would come. These prophecies fueled the emotions of those overwhelmed by anxiety (Kartodirdjo, 1984). The Krakatoa eruption strengthened the messianic movement, as the disaster was seen as a sign of the end times (apocalypse) (Bosnak & Honings, 2020). Imam Mahdi would restore the situation for the better. Incidents fueled by religious feelings began to be heard in late 1883 (Imadudin, 2020).

The context of colonialism in an atmosphere of disaster encouraged the emergence of another issue: resistance to foreign domination. People fanatical about religion became more militant after listening to sermons that called for resistance to the Dutch colonial government. Individuals and groups began to attack the Dutch (Hakim, 198). “In the case of the Cilegon rebellion, it can be said that the natural disaster caused by the eruption of Krakatoa was a mobilizing cause, especially concerning the religious aspect” (Lapian, 1987: 224). Religious revival and resistance to colonialism became essential issues in the 1883 Krakatoa disaster.

The colonial government has taken steps to handle disaster-affected victims. Assistance to improve the psychological condition of the population was distributed, such as clothing, food, capital, or money, repairing housing, repairing roads, and so on. However, this could not improve social relations between the indigenous people and the colonial government. The psychological problems faced by the population worsened due to hardship, suffering, and disaster (Tantri, 2014).

Solidarity actions became a critical issue in handling the 1883 Krakatoa disaster. Information obtained from indigenous sources regarding how to evacuate the disaster is almost nonexistent. In contrast, information on how the colonial government initiated aid and evacuation of victims affected by the disaster is abundant. The Indigenous source that provides information related to the Krakatoa disaster is the manuscript “Syair Lampung Dinaiki Air Laut” (The Poem of Lampung climbed by sea water) and “Syair Lampung Karam Adanya” (The Poem of sunken Lampung there) (Rujati-Mulyadi, 1983). The poem was completed forty days after the disaster. Muhammad Saleh recounts the destruction of villages and mass deaths caused by the tsunami, mud, ash, and rockfall triggered by Krakatoa's eruption. Here is one of the excerpts:

*Bunyi ratib nyatalah terang
The sound of the ratib is bright
Datanglah air serta gelombang
Water and waves come
Roboblah rumah tunggang langgang
Down comes the house
Yang hidup hanyalah seorang
There is only one person alive*

*Dengan takdir khalik al-alam
By the destiny of the khalik al-alam
Perasaan kiamat dunia terendam
The feeling of the end of the world is submerged
Bermaaf-maafan mana berdendam
Forgive were to hold a grudge*

*Bersalam-salaman samanya Islam
Shaking hands with Islam*

Solidarity and Religious Sentiments

The Banten Provincial Government held a dhikr and joint prayer on New Year's Eve (December 31, 2018). The event occurred at Al-Bantani Mosque, Banten Provincial Government Center (KP3B), Serang City. All elements of government and society attended the event. Before carrying out dhikr and prayer, previously held khatam Qur'an, Isha prayers in congregation, and then dhikr and prayer together. The Governor invited all attendees to do introspection and muhasabah for the various events. Furthermore, he said the disaster was a warning for humans (<https://biropemerintahan.bantenprov.go.id/post/Wahidin-Halim-Ajak-Warga-Banten-Intro-speksi-Diri-Terkait-Bencana-Tsunami-Selat-Sunda>).

Banten scholars stated that the 2018 tsunami disaster was a test from Allah SWT. KH Ma'ani Rusdi, head of the Mathla'ul Anwar Linnahdlatil Ulama (Malnu) Islamic Boarding School in Menes, Pandeglang, called on the affected residents to be patient and steadfast for the test (<https://banten.antaraneews.com/news/32804/tokoh-ulama-pandeglang-prihatin-tsunami-diselat-sunda>). At the pesantren, a special istighosah was held, which was attended by residents and several areas in the Banten region. This activity aims to pray for the victims, those who died, and hope that Allah and husnul khotimah will accept all their deeds. The event was also attended by mustasyar PBNU, KH Ma'ruf Amin, who also gave tausiyah for the event (<https://www.republika.co.id/berita/pkh615428/ulama-banten-gelar-shalat-ghaib-untuk-korban-tsunami>).

Another issue that developed was the existence of apostasy or coercion of tsunami victims to convert to a particular religion associated with the provision of material assistance in Banten. This issue was denied by the Ministry of Religious Affairs of Banten Province. To counteract this issue, the government assigned religious instructors and teachers to several disaster-affected locations to provide spiritual guidance to tsunami victims (<https://bantenhits.com/2018/12/28/muncul-isu-korban-tsunami-dipaksa-pindah-agama-kemenag-banten-turunkan-pe-nyuluh-dan-guru>).

During the aftermath of the Sunda Strait tsunami, in addition to feelings of empathy and sympathy, tangible solidarity support in the form of assisting poured in. Much assistance came from volunteers from government agencies and other elements of society who helped evacuate

salvageable and valuable items from the ruins of the residents' houses. Religious institutions provided spiritual guidance and assistance to victims affected by the tsunami. In its 2018 year-end release, MUI (Indonesian Ulema Council) invited people to revive social awareness in the coming year in connection with the many disasters that hit the country, including in Banten ([https://hidayatullah.com/berita/nasional/read/2018/12/31/157454/mui-2019-jadikan-tahun-kepedulian-sosial-bantu kor-ban-bencana.html](https://hidayatullah.com/berita/nasional/read/2018/12/31/157454/mui-2019-jadikan-tahun-kepedulian-sosial-bantu-kor-ban-bencana.html)).

There are several exciting things to discuss when comparing the religious issues arising from the 1883 Krakatoa disaster and the 2018 Banten tsunami. The religious issues in the two events have similarities and differences. In both events, disasters were addressed with efforts to increase piety towards God. Disasters are God's destiny that cannot be avoided, and humans ask for God's help as much as possible. Phrases such as “resignation,” “destiny,” “mortal realm,” and “apocalypse” show the inferior position of humans before their God.

The concept of a *zeitgeist*, or to borrow Kuntowijoyo's sense of sensibility, influences how people give meaning to disasters. *Zeitgeist* is an idealistic historical perspective that argues that thoughts influence behavior. For Kuntowijoyo, the term sensibility is preferable to the *zeitgeist*. The *zeitgeist* is too speculative and abstract, whereas sensibility includes the emotional content of a historical period (Nursam, 2002).

The late 19th century was when colonialism intensified its conquest of the Indies and exploitation of its resources. In various sources related to the 1883 eruption, the Krakatoa eruption is considered a punishment, a doom, or a rebuke to arbitrary Dutch colonialism. An angry colonized society's psychological atmosphere is represented by Krakatoa's eruption and the great tsunami. Meanwhile, in the 2018 disaster, disasters are considered calamities and tests for the people who experience them. As calamities, disasters become a reflection media so that people carry out religious teachings consistently, develop kindness, and care more about others.

In the Krakatoa disaster of 1883, the Dutch East Indies government and international private institutions initiated solidarity with the victims. Only a little information is available on how local solidarity became an essential part of disaster management. Meanwhile, the issue of solidarity was more apparent in handling the 2018 tsunami disaster. The government and especially religious institutions took an important role in post-disaster recovery.

There have been few studies on the relationship between disasters and religious issues in a historical context. Thus, this paper contributes to filling the space in studying history and religion. This article is the novelty of the previous article. However, this article has limitations in showing a more appropriate and structured comparison. Because this article is based on a literature study, it certainly has limitations in revealing the emic side of disaster-affected victims. Studies like this have good prospects, especially to see religion's contribution in mitigating and treating disaster victims.

REFERENCES

- Andini, R. (2021). Pengaruh Pengalaman Bencana Terhadap Kesiapsiagaan Menghadapi Tsunami pada Masyarakat Desa Caringin Kecamatan Labuan Kabupaten Pandeglang. Skripsi. Program Studi Tadris Ilmu Pengetahuan Sosial Fakultas Ilmu Tarbiyah dan Keguruan Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta.
- Arsipnas. (2003). Penerbitan Naskah Sumber Gunung Krakatoa Meletus 1883. Jakarta: Arsip Nasional RI.
- Bosnak, J. and Honings, R. (2020). Behoed ons arme volk voor de vulkaan-poëten? De literaire verwerking van de Krakatoa-ramp van 1883 in Nederland en Indonesië. Leiden: Primavera Pers.
- van Duijn, Tamara. (2012). Rampen in kolonial Indonesië: De framing van rampen in de kranten gepubliceerd in Nederlands-Indië 1867-1930. Scriptie MA History; European Expansion and Globalisation. Oktober 2012.
- Fauzi, A., Hunainah, dan Humaedi. Menyimak Fenomena Tsunami Selat Sunda. JURNAL GEOGRAFI: Geografi dan Pengajarannya. Volume XVIII Nomor 1 Juni 2020, 43-62.
- Garraghan, Gilbert J. (1957). A Guide to Historical Method. Volume 1. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Ha, Kyoo-Man. The Role of Religious Beliefs and Institutions in Disaster Management: A Case Study. Religions 2015, 6, 1314–1329; doi:10.3390/rel6041314
- Hakim, Abdul. (1981). 100 tahun Meletusnya Krakatoa, 1883-1983. Jakarta: Pustaka Antar Kota.
- Imadudin, I. "Penanganan Korban Bencana Alam dalam Dua Peristiwa: Letusan Krakatoa 1883 dan Tsunami NAD 2004". Buddhiraacana No. 1 Edisi Nopember Tahun 2009, 301-308.
- _____. Bencana Krakatoa 1883 dalam Tinjauan Budaya Lokal Banten. Prosiding Seminar Nasional Arkeologi "Petaka dalam Kehidupan Manusia", 18—20 November 2020.
- Jayasuriya, S. and McCawley, P. (2010). The Asian Tsunami: Aid and Reconstruction after a Disaster. Massachusetts, USA: ADB Institute-EE Publishing.
- Jones, C.O. (1977). An Introduction to the Study of Public Policy. Massachusetts: Duxbury Press.
- Kartodirdjo, Sartono. (1984). Pemberontakan Petani Banten 1888. Jakarta: Pustaka Jaya.
- Khan, N., Ahmed, I., Shamim, K. Disaster Management And Religious Insight: A Comprehensive Analysis. International Journal of Current Research. Vol. 14, Issue, 01, pp.20472-20479, January 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24941/ijcr.43022.01.2022>
- Lapian, A.B. "Bencana Alam dan Penulisan Sejarah (Krakatoa 1883 dan Cilegon 1888)", dalam T. Ibrahim Alfian dkk (ed.). (1987). Dari Babad dan Hikayat sampai Sejarah Kritis. Yogyakarta: UGM Press.
- Mustaqim, Abdul. "Teologi Bencana dalam Perspektif AL Quran". Nun, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, 91-109.

- Nguyen, N., Griffin, J., Cipta, A. and Cummins, P. R. (2015). Indonesia's Historical Earthquakes: Modelled examples for improving the national hazard map. Record 2015/23. Geoscience Australia, Canberra. <http://dx.doi.org/10.11636/Record.2015.023>
- Nursam, M. (2002). *Pengumpulan Seorang Intelektual: Biografi Soedjatmoko*. Jakarta: Gramedia.
- Solihuddin, T., Salim, H.L., Husrin, S., Daulat, A., & Purbani, D. "Dampak Tsunami Selat Sunda di Provinsi Banten dan Upaya Mitigasinya". *Jurnal Segara* Vol.16 No.1 April 2020: 15-28.
- Sudiyono. (2006). Isu: Sebuah Technical Term dalam Khasanah Ilmu Kebijakan. *Manajemen Pendidikan* No: 01/Th II/April/2006, 14-25.
- Sururoh, L., Saputra, A.R., Hapsari, I., Lubis, N.R., Trinirmalaningrum. (2020). *Banten: Memori dan Pengetahuan Lokal tentang Bencana*. Jakarta: Perkumpulan Skala Indonesia.
- Sutarman, Yuniarsih, Y., Herlina, M.G. "Pemberdayaan Masyarakat Korban Tsunami Selat Sunda Kampung Nelayan Teluk Labuan Banten". *Jurnal Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat*. Volume II Nomor 2 November 2019, 1-12.
- Tantri, E. Letusan Krakatoa 1883: Pengaruhnya Terhadap Gerakan Sosial Banten 1888. *Jurnal Masyarakat & Budaya*, Volume 16 No. 1 Tahun 2014, 191-214.
- Winchester, Simon. (2003). *Krakatoa: Ketika Dunia Meledak, 27 Agustus 1883*. Jakarta: Serambi.