

# Making Dirty Money in Yogyakarta



*Merapi's ash provides a dusty lining for owners of motorcycle cleaning services*

Report Gde Dwitya Arief

In my favorite Jim Jarmusch movie, "Stranger Than Paradise," there is a scene where two hipsters travel to Cleveland to escape their boring New York lives, only to find snow covering the city. Those scenes remind me of Yogyakarta, which has been blanketed in ash since Mount Merapi started erupting last month.

The only difference is that, while snow reflects sunlight to make everything shiny and beautiful, the grey ash absorbs it and makes the province look ghastly.

Though Merapi continues to rumble and spew thick ash clouds, some Yogyakarta residents have started to clean off the sheets of dust covering their neighborhoods. I have seen people splashing water on the streets to prevent the ash from swirling in the air and making it difficult to breathe.

The health risks posed by the ash has definitely been a major concern. Nadja, a German anthropology student at Gadjah Mada University, said she received an embassy advisory to leave the area until the ashes are cleared.

"It's bad for our lungs and masks don't actually help very much," she said, adding that she would be spending time in nearby Bali for awhile.

Megan, an American researcher in Yogyakarta who spent five months

studying Spanish at Ecuador's Universidad San Francisco de Quito, said the Indonesian government should enlist the public in cleaning efforts, citing the aftermath of an eruption in Ecuador.

"In Quito, where the Pichincha volcano erupted in 2004, the Ecuadorian government required citizens to help clean up the ash from streets and parks," she said. "They gave high-quality masks to the residents in order to protect them from the danger of breathing volcanic ash."

With a broom in every hand, who knows how fast Yogyakarta could start looking like its normal, clean self again?

"Usually, people do kerja bakti, or community service, to clean up their environment," said Reza, a translator based in Bantul.

But others aren't as inclined to render valuable cleaning services for free, with good reason. Take motorbike-washing businesses, for instance.

I saw at least 80 dusty motorbikes lined up in front of Nugroho V on Jalan Mataram, near Babarsari. Clearly, a multitude of bike-riding Yogyakartans had taken ash-covered routes, swirling up



Eruptions have transformed the city's roads into a nightmare for drivers. JG Photos/Sayoga Wicaksana

dust in their wake.

While I sat waiting for my motorcycle to be cleaned recently, I chatted with Hari, who worked for a sports apparel distributor. "I usually come here once every two weeks, but this week, I have already been here three times," he said.

A middle-aged, white-collar man and a good-looking girl were also waiting on bamboo sofas for their bikes to be washed. The place had barely been open for an hour.

I counted six men with bubble-soaked sponges and water hoses at work in Nugroho V. I seemed to recall that before nearby Mount Merapi started erupting on Oct. 26, there

were only two workers here.

I also noticed a new sign hanging on the wall that said washing services were priced at Rp 6,000 (67 cents). The price of washing services had gone up a little from Rp 5,000 before the disaster.

After waiting for almost half an hour, I finally noticed that my bike was being washed by a small but athletic-looking man. I approached him to ask how many bikes the shop usually handled in a day ever since the volcano erupted.

"We usually have 80 to 90 bikes on a normal day. After the disaster, we have been very busy. We get 150 bikes per day. At Nugroho IV [another branch of the shop], we even get around 225 bikes," he said.

Doing the math, at 150 washes per day at Rp 6,000 each, the shop is now bringing in

around Rp 900,000 a day. This means that if the ash problem keeps up, the shop could make Rp 27 million in a month.

The Nugroho IV branch might even pull in more money, making Rp 1.35 million a day on 225 washes.

It could even make Rp 40.5 million a month — not quite as much as President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's monthly salary, which is around Rp 56 million.

A motorbike-washing business needs a reliable water compressor, which costs around Rp 2.5 million according to Hari, and a modified oxygen tube for bubbles, which "doesn't cost that much."

With a starting capital of Rp 5 million for equipment, workers' salaries and rent, an entrepreneur can easily make several million rupiah a month.

No wonder Nugroho has five branches. I can only imagine how similar businesses, such as car washes, are faring.

While businesses like Nugroho are doing their bit to clean a vital mode of transport, one can't deny that there is still the bigger task of cleaning up Yogyakarta, one dusty inch at a time.

**[The ash] is bad for our lungs and the masks don't actually help very much'**

Nadja, German anthropology student

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**Healthy Inside & Outside**

**Be inspired and be an inspiration** is the phrase that encourages me to achieve my goals and dreams. For me, intelligence can be enhanced by learning, and skills can be gained by instruction, but the spiritual values are acquired through life experience.

During three years at UPH, I learned much about the value of my life, which inspired my future plans. This generation will determine the future of Indonesia. My own life is proof. I'm dedicating myself to tourism by holding a degree, but I've already achieved more than those who have further degrees or education. Because of the programs at the Pelita Harapan School of Hospitality and Tourism, and the integrity of its lecturers, I have learned about life's significance, so I will never waste my talents or opportunities.

Edwin Handoyo Lauwy  
Healthy Chef  
Alumnus Hospitality Management 2003  
Pelita Harapan School of Hospitality and Tourism

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