Chapter 12
The Religious Dimension of Coping: The Roles of Cosmologies and Religious Practices

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This chapter was written by the first author, based on her conceptual work and in-depth analysis of the data. The second author's contribution to the chapter lies in the preliminary analysis of data on this same subject.

> When the dust settles over a ruined landscape, for survivors it is religion and the sacred that become exceptionally important. (Islam 2012, p. 209)

Confronted with destruction and loss, many disaster survivors turn to religion, seeking to derive meaning from religious cosmologies and looking for support from the divine or the religious community. However, mainstream disaster and coping theories have both neglected the role of religion. Candland (2000) goes so far as to detect an anti-religious bias in the social sciences for their tendency to devalue religion as an obstacle to "reasonable" responses and as a source of violent conflict. In coping theories, as Pargament (1997) claims, religion has been associated with "acquiescence and lethargy" (p. 177). Countering this bias, Pargament and others have elaborated an approach to religious coping (see Sect. 2.2.3). However, these studies of religious coping still reproduce other aspects of the ethnocentric bias of appraisal-based theories (see Sect. 2.4.1). In the context of disaster research and management, religion similarly was either disregarded (Gaillard and Texier 2010) or viewed as an obstacle to the reduction of vulnerability or as a "lack of resilience rather than an expression of a constructive engagement with (the forces of) nature" (Islam 2012, p. 210). As in mainstream psychology, religion tends to be associated with fatalism (Oliver-Smith 1996; Islam 2012). Such presumed fatalism runs counter to the explicit and implicit cultural values of hegemonic approaches to disaster: human control, which is

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grounded in a technocratic ideal of safety (see Chap. 1). Dismantling the stereotype of religion as fatalism, several authors assert the potential of religion as a resource in disaster contexts (see, for example, Gaillard and Texier 2010; Chester et al. 2012; Islam 2012). Others, such as Schlehe (2008, 2010), have realized how religious discourse on disaster enables individuals and social groups to articulate their critical views on society, thus contributing to a "hermeneutics of disaster" (Campbell-Nelson 2008).

As opposed to universalist approaches to religion developed in mainstream religious coping research, any *cultural* psychological approach needs to account for the sociocultural embeddedness of religion (see Gaillard and Texier 2010), including local forms of globalized religions such as Islam or Christianity. Further, in Chapter 4 we argued for a broad anthropological understanding of religion which encompasses diverse experiences, practices, or expressions of humans relating to "a meta-empirical sphere that may be glossed as supernatural, sacred, divine, or transcendental" (Meyer 2006, p. 6). Javanism or *kejawen* is thus analyzed as religion, even though it contains a broad ethical frame (Mulder 1990), which is not just related to the meta-empirical sphere. The religious practice of the majority of people in Java can be established as a religious variety (Beatty 1999) oscillating between Islam and *kejawen*. Our research sites reproduce such variety: most of our respondents refer to a more or less *kejawen*-inspired Islam, while a minority adheres to Christianity. Our interview data indicate diverging prioritizations of more "Islamic" or more "Javanese" values, though most respondents did not fit into such a binary classification.[1] While adherence to Islam or Christianity was easily known, substantial differences between Muslim and Christian respondents appeared to be secondary to common interpretative frames of Javanese concepts and values.

This religious plurality showed in the various ways in which the divine was addressed: most commonly used were the words *Allah*, *tuhan* (Lord, God) or *Yang kuasa* (Javanese: *Sing Kuoso*), which literally means, "Who has/have power."[2] Despite the different connotations of these words, which might have hinted at a certain religious positioning, such as *Allah* to Islam or *Yang Kuasa* to *kejawen*, the empirical use of these terms underscored the ambiguity of the field. In order to maintain this ambiguity, we chose to refer to the divine as an overarching or general category that encompasses all these connotations, while using the more specific terminology when analyzing respondents' statements.

This chapter will place a special focus on religious meaning-making and the cosmological understandings on which religious coping efforts were based. This emphasis is due to the strengths and weaknesses of our qualitative interview data,

[1] More in-depth interview material on religious matters might have provided us with a clearer picture, though a certain degree of indistinctiveness may be a characteristic of the field itself, as Beatty (1999) has argued for Banyuwangi.

[2] As indicated by this literal translation, the emic term is grammatically ambivalent, designating either a singular divine being or plural divine beings. *Yang kuasa* might be imagined as one or many, leaving interpretative flexibility to contestations of pantheistic and monotheistic perspectives (see Beatty 1999).

which provided us with 2-year retrospective accounts and interpretations of the event, where religious meanings and general values were elaborated more broadly than distinct religious practices. The performance of religion enters the final section on the vertical and horizontal relations of religion, though it requires further research.

12.1 Religious Meaning-Making

In the immediate aftermath, the earthquake survivors assessed their situation, trying to understand what had just happened. In the further course of coping, people continued to make sense of and adjust their earlier interpretations. The data of our study provide us with information on retrospective interpretations or (re)evaluations 2–3 years after the event. Such processes of meaning-making potentially involve all aspects of life, among which religion provides a fundamental resource endowing the disaster with meaning (for intersections with other dimensions, see Sects. 9.1 and 11.3). Meaning is a fuzzy concept. In order to sharpen it, Davis et al. (1998) breaks meaning-making down into sense-making, which reflects the fit between the ways in which the world is expected to work and the actual event, and benefit-finding, where the event is (re)evaluated in terms of its positive effects and its significance for one's own life. But sense is at least made in regard to two different aspects of explanation: physical explanations answer the "how" question, while metaphysical explanations respond to the ultimate question of "why" (see Macamo and Neubert 2004). Metaphysical explanations allow personal significance or benefit to be found. Seeking to illuminate the processes of meaning-making in coping, Park (2010) introduced the distinction between situational and global meanings. According to her psychological meaning-making model, coping processes only succeed if congruence between them is (re)established. Transferred to religious meaning-making, we therefore ask how religious meanings that are attributed to the disaster itself (situational meanings) relate to general views on life and the world (global meanings)?

12.1.1 Physical and Metaphysical Explanations

Asked about the meaning attributed to the earthquake, the majority of respondents answered in terms of religion, interpreting the disaster as divine test (*cobaan*, *ujian)* or admonishment (*peringatan*). Only singular voices referred to the earthquake in terms of divine punishment (*hukuman*) or wrath of God (*murka Allah).* All of these frames suggest a divine purpose behind the occurrences, which can be deciphered as communication from the transcendent realm. But they differ with regard to the question of human misconduct or blame. Explicit attributions of blame were only articulated by the two respondents who respectively interpreted the earthquake as a punishment and coming from the wrath of God. According to Pak Susilo from

Sendang the earthquake came as a punishment from the Higher Power(s) (*Yang Kuasa*) and was provoked by human exploitation of nature. Conversely, Pak Nurdin from Sido Kabul concluded that human sin had incurred the wrath of Allah, and he supported his interpretation by referencing a quote from the Quran: "Corruption has flourished on land and sea as a result of people's actions and He will make them taste the consequences of some of their own actions so that they may turn back" (Quran 30: 41; Oxford World's Classics edition 2004). Susilo and Nurding both ascribe the cause of the disaster to prior human misconduct, thus following a logic of punishment. Susilo deploys more of a "Javanese" frame, while Nurdin argues through Islam.

Much more common was the frame of admonishment (*peringatan*), which implies divine criticism of human conduct and calls for change or improvement. But other than punishment, the notion of admonition does not necessarily imply unusual misconduct or specific sins. The notion of admonishment suggests human imperfection and carries the idea that any believer requires such reminders in order to (further) improve her or his faith.[3] Another religious frame, mostly mentioned in accounts of the initial event, is the Islamic and Christian concept of doomsday *(kiamat*). Inherent in the concept itself, this interpretation is tied to a specific moment in time, namely the ongoing crisis, and does not qualify as producing long-term meaning: if the world did not end, it could not have been the end of the world. Thus some villagers shifted to the concept of "little doomsday" (*kiamat kecil*), which functions as a reminder of the actual doomsday (cf. Akasoy 2009) and enhances people's awareness of their duty to "do good." In that sense, the idea of "little doomsday" is semantically close to the meanings of reminder, warning, or admonition (*peringatan*).

Yet another notion is communicated in the popular frame of divine testing (*cobaan, ujian*), because testing implies challenge rather than criticism or even punishment. The believers' faith is tested through crisis and can be proved in the process of coping. Schlehe (2008) documents an interview with a representative of the modernist Muslim organization Muhammadiyah, who expressed this very interpretation of the Bantul earthquake as a divine testing and quoted yet another Quranic verse: "We shall certainly test you with fear and hunger, and loss of property, lives, and crops. But [Prophet], give good news to those who are steadfast, those who say, when afflicted with a calamity, 'We belong to God and to Him we shall return.' These will be given blessings and mercy from their Lord, and it is they who are rightly guided" (Quran 2: 155–157). The frame of a divine test is thus directed less at the pre-disaster past and more at the present and future (cf. Akasoy 2009).

Ultimately, all of these religious frames share the interpretation of the temporal worldly disorder as a divine reminder of a superior transcendent order, by which humans are positioned in relation to the divine. Suffering is perceived as instrumental to the divine purpose, as Chester et al. (2012) describe it as a common characteristic of Islamic interpretations. Notions of divine purpose or divine message provide

[3] The Indonesian term *peringatan* even literally translates as "reminder". Accordingly, Schlehe (2006) has chosen the German translation *Erinnerung*.

believers with personal significance. However, the content of the divine message is interpreted in various ways, depending on individual context.

In our interview data, although such metaphysical understandings of the disaster are widely represented, interpretations referring to physical or material causality were rarely articulated. However, this finding does not allow us to conclude that these were less important to our respondents, because our interview guidelines explicitly addressed the metaphysical explanatory level of ascribed meaning while neglecting the "how" question.[4] Only a few respondents addressed the physical level, mostly by referring to standard geological explanations, framing the earthquake as a natural disaster (*bencana alam*) caused by the movement of tectonic plates. However, such references to science were complemented by religious interpretations. Thus science and religion were not perceived as mutually exclusive cosmologies (see Schlehe 2008; Frömming 2006; Islam 2012). The earthquake was explained as a worldly, geographical event serving a divine purpose and containing a divine message. As Rohyati from Sendang put it, it is a matter of perspective: "According to religion, the earthquake definitively is a divine test (*cobaan*), an ordeal (*ujian*) [. . .]. But in the context of natural science (*ilmu alam*) or—how do you call it—biology or physics, then, it is different from religion." Then he continued to elaborate on tectonic plates.

Pure science-based interpretations, which rendered the earthquake explicable exclusively in terms of geology, were hardly articulated. Pak Rohman from Mulya Sari was one of the very few respondents to do so:

> It is a disaster, everything was ruined by the earthquake. Nothing remained. But it's fine. If it is supposed to happen, let it be (*ya sudah*). If people are struck by an earthquake, everyone is struck. And then those who got hurt, well, they are hurt, and those who aren't, aren't. That's how it is. (Pak Rohman, Mulya Sari)

His comparatively arid interpretation of the earthquake might originate from the fact that his elderly sister was severely injured in it. Even when further asked about the significance the event had on him, Rohman remained straightforward: "What I drew [from the event] is just that I am alive." But he still ascribed the very question of survival, injury and death, to the higher power(s) (*yang kuasa*). In a similar way, Mbak Mulyani, who lost her mother, saw the earthquake exclusively as a natural disaster and explicitly rejected any religious frame or metaphysical explanation. Obviously, she feared that such frames would ascribe guilt to her mother or family. Mulyani is a pious Christian, and despite her secular interpretation of the earthquake, she was convinced that the death of her mother itself had a divine purpose: "God had better plans for her." Opposing the interpretative frames of admonition, test, and punishment, Rohman and Mulyani attributed causality of the earthquake primarily on the physical level, leaving metaphysical interpretations aside. However, when it comes to coping with distinct injuries and death, to the painful consequences of the earthquake, both referred to a general religious frame of divine control and intent.

[4] Most interviews did not touch upon physical explanations of the event because the interview guidelines rather asked about assigned meanings (*makna, arti*) and the subjective relevance of the event rather than causal explanations.

Alternative physical explanations, or geomythologies (Chester et al. 2012), were hardly mentioned in our data, and if so were accompanied by dissociation and laughter. The head of a religious boarding school, Pak Budiman, described how children imagined that God had moved the tectonic plates by His own hands. While an elderly woman from Mulya Sari, humorously provoked by her daughter, recounted how "the ancestors" had explained earthquakes as the subterranean movement of a giant snake. Both speakers distanced themselves from these alternative "geologics" by ascribing them to either childhood imaginations or the past; both seemed keen to position themselves as modern educated persons. References to Javanese mythology were absent in our interview data, a fact that may seem striking to those familiar with Schlehe's (for example 2006, 2008, 2010) anthropological work on spiritual interpretations of the earthquake. Only when explicitly asked did the old graveyard keeper from Mulya Sari mention Ratu Kidul, the queen of the South Sea, a goddess ruling all spirits of Java.[5]

12.1.2 (Re)Evaluations of Personal Significance

By implying divine purpose, transcendent frames foster positive reevaluations of the event and encourage a process of benefit finding. Abstractly put, they transform the situation of loss and suffering into a situation of gain. Several other keywords with more or less religious connotations indicate a similar process. While the frames of admonition and test form a bridge between metaphysical purpose and personal significance, other common frames such as deeper wisdom (*hikmah*), lesson (*pelajaran*), or awareness (*kesadaran*) expressed personal significance itself. As mentioned above, the search for personal significance touches upon elements of all four of our analytical dimensions: the material, the social, life conduct, and religion. With regard to the latter, the following insights and changes were formulated:

- Being reminded of a transcendental order: of divine omnipotence versus human powerlessness and of the limited span of life on earth versus prospects of the afterlife.
- Increased faith: a deeper relationship to the divine, a realization of the requirement to surrender to the divine, or experience of one's own faith as a resource.
- Improved character: self-correction, reduction of sins, and return to the right path.
- Increased praying: increased attendance at public prayers, conducting the five daily prayers (*solat*) more regularly, and starting to pray regularly.

[5] Such differences call for reflections on the intersubjectivity of research: our interviews were conducted by Indonesian university students, who interviewed a range of village elite and ordinary residents. Talking to young representatives of the Indonesian academia, village residents might have elaborated on views of disaster they thought would be "acceptable" according to such standards, while neglecting others. Conversely, Schlehe might have produced the opposite tendency, as she has been researching *kejawen* mythology for many years and based her data on interviews conducted with people she specifically approached to elaborate on spiritual aspects of the earthquake in 2006 (see Schlehe 2006).

- Improved quality prayer.
- Increased charity (*amalan*).

Quantitative or qualitative improvements in prayer activities were a common theme in meaning-making. Pak Suparno, for example, deemed the earthquake a divine admonishment, which reminded humans of the finiteness of their worldly lives and the necessity to do good (*berbuat baik*):

> Actually, now, after the earthquake many people pray (*sholat*) [. . .] They are afraid to die, because later, they say, if you didn't conduct [yourself] well in life, you will be tortured in hell. [. . .] [That is why] we are improving ourselves from now on. [. . .] Perhaps it was the admonishment (*peringatan*) by the power of Allah that humans have to do good (*berbuat* baik). (Pak Suparno, Sendang)

Suparno refers to a general change of awareness, spiritual self-improvement, and increased prayer activity. Bu Surini from Sendang added an additional social twist to the interpretation of admonishment. For her, the very experience of the emergency situation, when rich and poor gathered together in emergency shelters, symbolized the essential equality of all humans before Allah, despite all worldly wealth and social status: "In front of Allah, even if you are president, you are just the same." A former neighborhood leader, Pak Subarkah, pondered a superior transcendental order. He emphasized how the earthquake gave humans proof of their own powerlessness and limited agency, while revealing divine omnipotence:

> What I learnt (*dapat*) from the earthquake is that we are really weak. [. . .] Even though we haven't yet experienced "The earthquake" (*izal zull zillaha*)[6] like in the Quran. In case of doomsday, wouldn't we feel even much weaker? [. . .] Where would we run to? After all, we, as believers, we should return (kembali) to the power of Allah. We should lean on Him (*semendhe*), surrender (*pasrah*). [. . .]. We always need to remember God's power immediately because we are religious, Islamic, pious people. [. . .] For if we wouldn't, we might get confused (*pusing*). (Pak Subarkah, Sendang)

From the relative weakness of humans and the absolute almightiness of Allah, Subarkah deduced that all believers need to entrust themselves to the divine. He sees this ability to surrender (*pasrah*) as a resource of the Islamic faith, which can psychologically protect humans confronted with crisis situations from confusion (*pusing*). Subarkah continued by listing further codes of conduct, all being grounded in trust in the transcendental order and providing guiding principles for emergency behavior. Skillfully mixing metaphorical with practical rhetoric, Subarkah explained how the earthquake had taught him that humans need to practice patience (*sabar*) because any hasty rescue action might have injured those being saved. We can see that he connects the value of endurance to the concept of acceptance:

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[6] The phrase "*izal zull zillaha"* is a Javanese pronunciation of the first words of the sura, "The earthquake" in Arabic, which refers to Judgment Day: "When the earth is shaken violently in its [last] quaking, when the earth throws out its burdens, when man cries, 'What is happening to it?'; on that Day, it will tell all because your Lord will inspire it [to do so]. On that Day, people will come forward in separate groups to be shown their deeds: whoever has done an atom's-weight of good will see it, but whoever has done an atom's-weight of evil will see that." (Quran 99: 18).

> Endurance (*tabah*) means that we accept (*menerima*) whatever happens, we accept (*menerima*) any event. [. . .] [Because] to whom do we want to address our protest? Who could be blamed? (Pak Subarkah, Sendang)

The need for acceptance derives from the divine world order. Since all events are contained in divine omnipotence, any expression of protest or complaint would necessarily be directed to the divine. Protesting is thus considered unacceptable, a religious norm that Subarkah conveyed by his rhetorical question.

Such normative expectations regarding disaster coping flared up every now and then in our interviews. As a general tendency, hegemonic discourses seemed to produce a necessity to find benefit in the earthquake. Only a few maintained a long-term negative narrative of loss. Among them was Rohyadi, a sand miner from Sendang, whose relative had suffered long-term injury from the earthquake. Despite having framed the earthquake as a divine testing (*cobaan*), he calculated that there was a negative balance overall when weighing his losses against benefits, both materially and spiritually. We found a few other interviews in which religious forms of meaning-making were suspiciously absent, despite religion playing a key role in other regards. One such respondent was Pak Basuki, who at the time of the interview was still struggling with the loss of his child. He asked whether he had to blame himself for previous sins, but when it came to the benefits he derived from the earthquake he avoided any spiritual reference, referring instead to the practical acquisition of new skills as a gain.

The vast majority of our respondents described their religious benefits as a gradual change or improvement or an increase in previously known norms and values (assimilation), rather than reporting or framing the disaster as a life-changing event (accommodation). However, individual interviewees saw their lives as having changed; the earthquake had made them realize their sinful wrongdoings and had led them back to the right path, turning them from being a gambler or drinker to a supportive husband, or finding true belief and a way of living religiously, which might even exceed the religious rigidity and narrowness approved by the village community itself.

12.2 Coping Against the Background of Human–Divine Relations

Religious meaning-making refers to the embeddedness of religious coping in general cosmologies or global meaning frames (Park 2010). Elaborating on the key aspects of human–divine relations, the following section will provide a deeper analysis of these global frames, showing how they affected the way people coped.

12.2.1 Implications of Divine Omnipotence

One of the fundamental realizations attributed to the earthquake was being reminded of the existence and omnipotence of the divine. Divine omnipotence suggests divine

intention behind every occurrence and thus implies a general abstract significance. As Pak Ahmad from Sendang put it: "Anything that happens through Allah certainly has a deeper meaning (*hikmah*) behind it." A person may gain insight into these intentions, or they may remain a "mystery beyond comprehension" (Adeney-Risakotta 2009, p. 239). But the general faith in a benevolent God consoled believers for such lack of comprehension: for example, though Mbak Mulyani could not find any answer to why her mother had died, she confided in God to have "better plans" for her family. Further, divine omnipotence implies not only potential risk, but also luck and happiness, as well as plight, survival, and death: "We live and die by the hand of God", as a neighborhood leader from Mulya Sari explained. Sunan, a youth from Sendang, transferred this to the risk of dying in an earthquake:

> Even if I tried to save myself by running to a mountain top, if I was meant to die that way, a landslide might occur [. . .] and I might be killed by falling rocks. [Or] Even if I was here sleeping, if I was not destined to die that way, my house might not be destroyed, or maybe it would collapse, but my room wouldn't. The key is that we believe in God (*tuhan*). (Mas Sunan, Sendang)

Despite all precautions, humans are subject to divine forces that defy human control and predictability. This does not imply that humans should not take precautionary measures such as building earthquake-proof houses. Ultimately though, humans cannot escape the divine will by taking such measures. However, through the ultimate divine power virtually everything is possible. For that reason, miracle narratives were a common element in our interviews too. Survivors were astonished by the small details that had ensured their survival. One respondent felt he had been miraculously protected when a wall collapsed in the direction of his motorbike instead of on himself; another reported how he was saved by an invisible hand pulling him aside just before his roof collapsed. Others hoped for miraculous physical recovery against the doctor's negative prognosis. Such miracles went beyond logic or science, and no university professor could explain them, as Kyai Abdul assured us. In reevaluating the past, the miracle narrative serves as a transcendent version of (hypothetical) beneficial comparisons (see Chap. 11), which is based on the idea that "it could have been worse"; in relation to people's outlook on the future it affords hope, and even against negative prognoses of science.

Through the earthquake, survivors experienced how it feels to be at the mercy of higher powers. Interpretations of these powers as natural may provide a causal explanation of "how" the destruction came about, but they do not offer much in the way of a metaphysical explanation. But being exposed to divine forces, or to natural forces mobilized by divine intention, adds a spiritual quality to the experience. Confronted with suffering and the limits of their own agency, humans could experience divine omnipotence. According to a broadly shared religious perspective, it was deemed "normal"—that is, within the horizon of expectancy—and spiritually beneficial for humans to experience their powerlessness in such a way. Though the disaster was horrifying and burdening in the way it was perceived by many participants, it did not disrupt or shatter general assumptions about the world because the world was not considered a stable and safe place—where dangers could be controlled

by humans—to begin with (cf. Magnis-Suseno 1989). Through the earthquake believers could experience the transcendental order of divine omnipotence and human weakness, thus enabling believers to grow spiritually and religiously.

12.2.2 The Trinity of Acceptance, Surrender, and Effort

Because human capacities of understanding and agency are limited in the face of divine omnipotence, humans should thus accept (*nrimo)* and surrender (*pasrah*).[7] Exposed to danger, any believer should turn to God and lean on Him (*semendhe)* in order to find an emotional relief, as Pak Subarkah elaborated above. Surrender and acceptance are considered key resources for coping with adversity. Sunan remembers the way his parents had conveyed to him how important it was to surrender and worship (*ibadah*) in any situation of threat in order to attain patience and calmness. Educated in this way, he claimed that he had kept cool and was relaxed (*nyantai-nyantai saja*) when the earthquake struck. Yet, later in the interview he mentioned that fear might arise despite surrender, but it could be reduced and he could be comforted by trust in the Almighty. In coping with the loss of his wife, Pak Priyanto found solace in his faith in the Almighty:

> It was an act of the Almighty (*Yang Kuasa*), so if she was taken by the Almighty, I can only accept it (*tinggal terima saja*) [. . .] For those who truly believe in the Almighty, whatever happens, they surrender (*pasrah*) with a calm heart (*tenteram hatinya*) [. . .] That is my belief (*percaya*) in the Almighty, thus I don't feel bereaved. (Pak Priyanto, Sendang)

According to religious discourse, however, the responses of acceptance and surrender alone are insufficient for coping with crisis situations. Both need to be complemented by a third element, namely effort (*usaha*). Effort refers to the human responsibility to take the initiative and shape one's own living conditions according to one's capacities. Although the stances of surrender and acceptance function to calm the mind, they only provide the precondition for outwardly directed actions (see Sect. 11.4.1), for effort (*usaha*), as Pak Susilo elaborated:[8]

> If we only accept (*nrimo*) and surrender (*pasrah*), there will be no development. It only serves to cool down our thoughts (*ngedem piker*), but we also need to cultivate ways to achieve something. [. . .] We cannot only expect [external] aid, but we must make our own effort (*berusaha*). According to our Javanese principles, food comes from the movement of our own hands. If we do not want to work, we will not eat. Although I am still young, I am fond of learning such ancestral knowledge. (Pak Susilo, Sendang)

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[7] The concepts of surrender (*pasrah*) and acceptance (*nirmo)* are closely interrelated and commonly deduced from each other. Even though respondents used both terms almost interchangeably, in its syntactical use, *pasrah* is related to the transcendent *(pasrah sama/ kepada tuhan*), and is therefore translated as surrender, whereas the Javanese *nrimo* or the Indonesian *menerima*, if specified by an object, refers to the acceptance of a situation (*nrimo lelakon*/*menerima keadaan*).

[8] From the perspective of life conduct, the correlation between acceptance and effort is discussed as consideration of inwardly and outwardly directed agency in Chap. 11.

Susilo's emphasis on effort hints at the *relativity* of human powerlessness, as well as at the human potential and responsibility for shaping the physical world, respectively. Like other members of the political elite, Pak Susilo ties the ideal of effort to a particular Javanese work ethic, emphasizing self-reliance and warning against becoming dependent on external aid (see Chap. 11).

This triad of acceptance, surrender, and effort needs to be understood as an ideal framework for coping. From this ideal perspective, general religious values translate into coping resources: surrender, trust, and faith are perceived as the core virtues and indicators of true beliefs. These normative values transform the situational coping challenge into a more general religious challenge, by which believers are tested or admonished to prove the extent of their faith. But actual processes of coping with the disaster may assume quite different trajectories. Especially respondents who were injured or confronted with the deaths or injuries of loved ones revealed discrepancies between ideal and actual crisis responses and testified to the personal struggles of dealing with such discrepancies. Bu Sum from Sendang started to cry when she told her interviewer about the loss of her son. After rescuing him barely alive from the ruins, she had held him in her hands, leaving the situation up to God (*menyerahkan*) while pleading for a miracle. She retrospectively described this emotional state as in between despair (*putus asa*) and surrender. In another example, Pak Subarkah went so far as to admit the limits to his ability to accept. Several of his family members had barely survived the earthquake. A few days later, his 3-year-old child had fallen sick and was been hospitalized. Subarkah described his fear for his child's survival as his cracking point:

> I could accept the earthquake, but when all of a sudden my child fell sick, my heart could not accept it (*hati niku ora iso nompo*). At that point, I refused (*nolak*). I was so sad because my child had survived the earthquake without harm. And despite the fact that some other family members had been injured [in the event], I could immediately return to Allah (*kembali kepada Allah*). But [at that time], when all of a sudden [my daughter fell sick], I questioned 'What is this supposed to be, Allah?' (Pak Subarkah, Sendang)

Subarkah shared the general ideal of unconditional trust in God, but experienced a personal limit to his acceptance. Eventually his child recovered, and at the time of the interview Pak Subarkah reflected upon his temporary rejection as a human weakness, which he seemed to own up to.

12.2.3 Notions of Fate and Prospects of the Afterlife

Divine omnipotence and human weakness both manifest themselves in the ultimate question of life and death. According to the broadly shared concept of fate (*takdir*), human destiny is determined by transcendent powers:

> We are human. We just can accept it. Everything has been arranged. We just let it flow. We let God preside, whatever will be the result, whether we die or survive. (Pak Subarkah, Sendang)

If it is time to die, death is inevitable; but if someone is not yet meant to die, it is possible to survive anything by divine power. Ideally, the human fear of death resolves itself into absolute trust in the divine. Accepting death as one of God's possible plans is the ultimate state of trust and surrender. In cases of bereavement, the notion of fate provides a general sense of significance because it implies a divine purpose behind the loss (see above).

Many respondents explicitly or implicitly assumed that the human experience continues beyond life on earth to the hereafter. In comparison, worldly life—may it be pleasant or hard, long or short—is secondary to the afterlife. As Kyai Abdul explained: "We live not only a worldly life, but also in the afterlife. And the afterlife is more eternal than our worldly life." When people die, they are thus imagined as going to a (better) afterlife. Given such a prospect, the finiteness of worldly life conveys a notion of consoling truth. The afterlife also implies an extended time frame for meaning-making. The relevance of (a good) worldly life decreases because the primary aim from a religious, mainly Islamic perspective is (a good) afterlife. This expectation or promise of a good afterlife provides a certain buffer zone for hardships in one's worldly life.

The prospect of an afterlife serves as an incentive, positively providing hopes for reward, and negatively providing a prospect of punishment and suffering in hell. Ideally, humans should conduct their worldly lives in such a way that they do not need to fear even sudden death. Humans can prepare for the afterlife by acting as good persons or believers in this life. Respondents who referred to the idea of an afterlife mostly emphasized the necessity to pray, to reduce, or compensate for one's sins, not to leave behind debts, and to acquire merit (*bekal*, literally provisions). Ideally, if believers have been leading a pious life, they can face even sudden death with a profound inner calmness (*tentram*). But this notion works both ways: thus if a person doubts her or his own piety, psychological distress might increase. It is widely held that, through the confrontation would death, believers would realize whether or not they felt adequately prepared to die, or whether they needed to change their way of life. Notably, respondents tended to ascribe such revelatory experiences to others, often implying a slightly derogatory notion:

> Besides suffering (*maut*), the earthquake brought us wisdom (*hikmahnya*). [. . .] [People asked themselves:] "If suddenly an earthquake happened, if I died and did not acquire any merit (*bekal*), what would happen to me?" Maybe people would become afraid and start to realize (*kesadarannya*). They would start to pray on a regular basis (*solat*), so that, if all of a sudden another earthquake happened and they died, they could face it sincerely (*ikhlas*). (Bu Jiyo, Sido Kabul).

But this emphasis on religious duty and on the need to prepare for the afterlife was not shared equally among all of our interviewees. Perspectives rather oscillated between two opposite poles, as represented by Pak Nurdin from Sido Kabul and Pak Priyanto from Sendang. Nurdin presented himself as recently converted by the earthquake and as having become a strict believer in a rather "Arabic" version of Islam. According to his understanding of Islam, humans are provided with divine rules to obey, and the need to recognize and follow the right path, as set by Allah. A good believer ought to worship (*ibadah*) Allah and fulfill his or her religious duties with sincerity. Pak

Nurdin went so far as to prioritize religious rules over harmonious community life and therefore was perceived as a bit too "fanatical" (*fanatik*) within his own village. Conversely, Pak Priyanto articulated a rather *kejawen*-influenced version of Islam, underlining the need for a strong character through which humans actively live their lives and direct themselves while also emphasizing human responsibility and effort (*usaha*). According to his worldview, divine power(s) only provide humans with basic tools, leaving it up to them to lead a good life and do right, or in his own words: "You are provided with feet and foot soles, but you should not just walk ahead, you need to direct yourself."[9] Pak Priyanto derived his strong emphasis on self-guidance from Javanese knowledge, which he introduced as traditional wisdom passed down from his grandfather. Comparing the two perspectives, the idea of fate (*takdir*) may have quite different implications: while for Nurdin religion provides believers with duties, rules, and a right path to follow, Priyanto locates the religious persons' guidance in themselves, without any right path (cf. Beatty 1999).

Material loss and gain are also perceived as a matter of fate, though such notions do not imply human passitivity, as the triad of acceptance, surrender, and effort has shown. Pak Siswanto framed the earthquake destruction as well as the reconstruction process as matters of fate and invoked the multifaceted notion of *rezeki,* which can be translated as either sustenance or luck. Both meanings are further implied as having been given by the divine:

> It was predetermined by fate (*sudah takdir*). And later the reconstruction was predestined as well (*sudah takdir*). [. . .] People need to look for sustenance (*rezeki*), and then they might be provided with sustenance/divine reward (*rezeki*). (Pak Siswanto, Sido Kabul)

Rezeki is an important element within the concept of fate, especially as it integrates the element of effort. *Rezeki* is a category of non-predictable material reward provided by the divine. People ought to prove their own efforts (*usaha*) and strive for economic progress (*mencari rezeki*), and they will then be rewarded. The timing and form of this reward, though, are uncertain and non-predictable, as the semantic notion of luck implies. People actively shape their course of life, but are incapable of determining it, because fate, after all, lies beyond the range of human influence. As the example of Pak Siswanto shows, this complex of fate, effort, and *rezeki* serves as an important reference in dealing with material loss and recovery (see also Sect. 9.3).

12.2.4 The Principle of Divine Lessons

Being examined by God (*cobaan; ujian*) or being taught a lesson (*pelajaran*) are common concepts not only with reference to disaster, but also in relation to negative life events in general, such as accidents, illnesses, or crimes. These frames imply a

[9] He further tied this principle of self-guidance to four key codes of conduct, presented by Pak Priyanto in yet another metaphor: "Every human alive needs reins (*kendali*). Just as animals have bridles and cars or bicycles have brakes, humans need ethical principles: patience (*sabar*), faith in the divine (*tawakal*), surrender (*pasrah*), remembering (*ingat*) [the divine]."

general worldview that integrates adverse and potentially disruptive events as challenges to the course of life. These frames suggest a global worldview, according to which uncontrollable life events are considered to be an integral part of human existence, calling for human humility and highlighting human imperfections, as well as the human potential for improvement. Despite all the suffering, these frames allow the image of the divine as benevolent to be maintained: the divine shows kindness through the examination, because it is only by being tested that humans can prove their faith. Kyai Abdul, a religious leader from Sendang, expressed this idea as follows:

> Allah or God (*tuhan*), has given us this test (*ujian*) to improve [. . .] our level of faith and piety towards God. It is comparable to schoolchildren who have to be examined. [. . .] Without tests, there wouldn't be any grades. (Kyai Abdul, Sendang)

The successful accomplishment of divine tests may be rewarded not only with grades metaphorically but also with tangible gains, measurable not least in the quantity of material aid, as received by Kyai Abdul for his religious boarding school. Bu Sulasmi deployed a similar religious logic of ambition, only for her the severity of the test constituted a distinction in itself, because Allah examines his congregation (*umat*) only according to their degree of faith: "The stronger their faith (*iman*), the harder the examination." Thus, in coping with the disaster, believers can prove that Allah was right to have challenged them through such an ordeal. Such interpretations add a transcendental motivational layer to the coping process and empower survivors to believe in their own coping capacities, since the divine challenge, however overwhelming it might seem, will not exceed their potential.

12.3 Religion as a Vertical and Horizontal Resource

The broad range of divine lessons expressed by our respondents points to a holistic understanding of the ideal human character (Fig. 12.1). According to this understanding, faith is not limited to the human–divine relationship, and even less to an institutionalized domain of religion, but is expressed as a way of life. The strength of faith manifests itself through spiritual awareness, worship and trust in God, as well as through quite general codes of conduct, such as acceptance, patience, or self-reliance (see Chap. 11), and also social awareness (see Chap. 10).

This holistic ideal of human character was broadly shared by those we interviewed, but respondents highlighted different aspects, and in this plurality mirrored general tendencies in the discourse on religion in Indonesia. In general, religion is considered to encompass both a vertical and horizontal dimension, the balance and interpretations of which are matters of debate. The vertical dimension refers to the relationship between the believer and the divine, while the horizontal relationship contextualizes the believer in her or his social environment. According to this perspective, the world is an inherently social space where religion is practiced in social cooperation and where faith constitutes a foundation for respect among humans. If we turn this discourse into an analytical lens, the transcendent dimension of coping

Fig. 12.1 Ideals and Anti-Ideals for Humans

encompasses a vertical component of communication with the divine and a horizontal component emphasizing the community aspect of religion (cf. Pargament 1997).

12.3.1 Communication with the Divine

The vertical dimension can be framed as a communicative relationship to a "force that goes beyond the individual" (Pargament et al. 2000, p. 521), which is expressed in prayer. Prayer practices can take many shapes, from the recitation of standard texts to spontaneous individual expressions, from external verbalizations to silent internal communications. The increased piety the earthquake produced was often described as a matter of convergence with God (*mendekatkan diri pada tuhan*), which could be attained by regular individual worship (*beribadah; solat*) and attending public prayers. This strong emphasis on prayer conventions represented Islamic perspectives rather than *kejawen* ideals, which place less emphasis on formalized prayer (Beatty 1999).

In narratives on the immediate emergency situation, prayer was often described as a mediator between fear and surrender. Prayer helped to overcome, reduce, or simply deal with fear by promoting the inner process of surrender. At the same time, prayer was described as an expression of surrender, because surrender is "only" a spiritual process, while prayer is a distinct practice. In crisis situations, when people feel powerless and incapable of acting, and when they do not know what to do, prayer fills the place of agency because it provides a useful thing to do, an activity, when there is nothing else left.

> I was afraid and I surrendered (*pasrah*); what else could I have done? (laughing) [. . .] I just prayed and asked for forgiveness for all my mistakes, because humans often make mistakes [. . .] I just prayed and asked for protection. (Bu Purwanti, Sendang)

Beyond this profane occupational aspect, prayer serves as technique for emotional management. Bu Sutini described how she struggled for inner peace by appealing to Allah:

> I just kept repeating my *tasbih* [a formula invoking Allah], but I still could not overcome my fear. [. . .] I begged Allah (*gusti Allah*) to save my grandchild. [. . .] I was emotionally upset (*tidak tentram*) [. . .] I prayed as hard as I could for Allah to give peace to my heart. (Bu Sutini, Sendang)

Bu Purwanti and Bu Sutini both turned to the divine with specific requests. While Bu Purwanti asked for her own protection and forgiveness in the face of the afterlife, Bu Sutini begged for her grandchild's survival. Other accounts contained requests for recovery, practical support, inner peace, salvation in the afterlife, or a place in heaven. In times of crisis it is common to ask for divine assistance, individually or institutionalized in public prayers. Families might invite the village community to pray for the cure and recovery of a severely ill family member, as was done for Pak Rohman's disaster injuries in Mulya Sari. It is also common to pray for the deceased on regular occasions.[10] Such ritual prayers may support the grieving process. However, due to the overwhelming chaos of the post-disaster period, death rituals were often improvised or neglected. Mourning the death of his child, Pak Hadi from Sendang complained about the laxness of his coresidents and felt neglected in having to conduct these ritual payers for the deceased himself.

Altogether prayer served different purposes, which were more or less explicitly expressed by our interviewees. Some requested practical support, such as food or being rescued from the ruins. Others searched for emotional support; prayer increased inner peace, reassured survivors that they could trust in the divine, and mediated the process of surrender. Routinized forms of prayer helped to reestablish a sense of normality, while prayer as a duty to worship was perceived as preparation for the afterlife.

The collaborative quality of the human–divine relationship is determined by the degree and character of one's personal intimacy with the divine. Bu Sum, a Christian, described an intense and personalized relation to God. She perceived Jesus as a communicative counterpart in everyday life and as a partner in problem solving. Waiting to be rescued from the ruins, she had cried out to God for support. Her calls were answered by a voice which had told her to pray and later on she was rescued. Her life narrative was full of similar miracles and successful interactions with the divine. In another example, Mbak Kusmini described her relationship with God (*Yang Diatas*) as intimate, but rather casual. For emotional support she generally seemed to rely on social networks and friends, but also turned to God, sharing her feelings (*curhat*), surrendering (*pasrah*), and praying for the well-being of her family. The way Kusmini described this communication implies a comparatively non-hierarchical relationship with God, because a colloquial term like *curhat*[11] would normally be used for intimate and casual communication among family, friends, or lovers.

The case of Pak Subarkah, who had faced the limits of his acceptance, indicates how people struggled with their religious beliefs. But our data do not contain any

[10] Ceremonies for the deceased should be held after 3, 7, 40, 100, and 1,000 days.

[11] *Curhat* is an abbreviation of *curah(an) hati*, literally 'pouring out one's heart'.

cases of believers who fundamentally questioned the divine or divine benevolence. Within the dominant discourse the emphasis is rather on how faith and people's personal relationships with God were strengthened by experiencing adversity, as expressed in the common idiom of "drawing nearer to God" (*mendekatkan diri pada tuhan*).

12.3.2 Religion as Community Relations

As soon as we turn to the horizontal relationship in religious coping, overlapping points with the social dimension (Chap. 10) become obvious. Religion is an inherently social phenomenon because it consists of shared cosmologies and is expressed as individual and collective practice. In the context of our research, religion further serves as an important basis of village life. Despite the dominance of the Muslim majority, religious plurality has an important value in maintaining a harmonious village life (see Beatty 1999). Most people maintained the view that any expression of religion needs to accord with this higher value of communal life, while fanatical (*fanatik*) interpretations of religion were explicitly rejected. During a focus-group discussion with village youth in Sendang, Sunan and Restu conveyed what they had learned from a village elder:

> Sunan: Most importantly, we have to struggle (*usaha*). As long as they live, humans need to look for money and food. If people worship (*ibadah*), they should not worship all the time, that would be wrong. Restu: We need a balance between religion and our worldly lives. [. . .] Problems arise if the balance is off. It is not good to place religion above everything, because we are social people, we live with other people. [. . .] But there are people who exaggerate, we call them "fanatics" (*fanatik*), because their solidarity is limited to the people within their congregation (*jamaahnya*). Sunan: . . . and not with the community in general.

In Sido Kabul, the newly converted Pak Nurdin was regarded as such a *fanatik.* His example illustrates how "too much religiousness" was disapproved of because it was considered a threat to a harmonious community life.[12] In the above quote, Sunan also weighed the value of effort (*usaha*) against worship (*ibadah*), thus stressing a Javanese work ethic over such *fanatik* interpretations of Islam.

If we turn from these rather general issues to socio-religious coping, at least two aspects should be mentioned. First, the collective experience of praying together, for example, in the immediate aftermath, when thunder, rain, and aftershocks increased the general atmosphere of confusion and fear, helped to calm people down. In addition to the effects of prayer discussed in the previous section, the collective quality of prayer provided survivors with a comforting sense of togetherness, what Pargament et al. (2000) referred to as intimacy. Second, religious communities can be analyzed

[12] This case was elaborated by Tiara R. Widastuti in her presentation "Earthquake and its relief processes as triggers of social inclusion and exclusion: a case study in Bantul, Yogyakarta" at the Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology in Melbourne, Australia, 08.07.2010.

from the perspective of social capital (for example, Candland 2000). In our case, religious networks provided material support in the form of emergency relief and funds for reconstructing religious facilities. But the involvement of religious donor agencies led to various problems because villagers were skeptical of the potential hidden agendas of Christian organizations, or feared co-optation by Islamic political parties (see Chap. 14).

12.4 Concluding Remarks

In conjunction with other dimensions, Bantul residents experienced religion as a key resource in coping with the earthquake and its aftermath. Shared religious cosmologies that placed divine omnipotence at their core served as foundational reference for survivors to find metaphysical meaning in the event and derive meaningful insights or other benefits from it. The experience of being at the mercy of the divine power, or of nature exercising divine intent, was interpreted as a reminder of the divine order or as a challenge to the believer's faith. As our interview data have shown, people were cautious in deploying religious discourses of blame, as interpretations such as "punishment" might suggest. However, questions of self-blame and the social fear of being blamed were certainly present.

As the relative absence of explicit blaming discourses suggests, respondents rarely deployed larger political discourses in the name of religion, such as Javanism versus Islam, or tradition versus modernity (cf. Schlehe 2008, 2010), though these issues were implicitly negotiated in the values emphasized in interpretations of the disaster. Differences showed in the various emphases our respondents placed on religious, social, and general ethic values, respectively. But these differences in prioritizing religious duties and rules as opposed to community cohesiveness, self-guidance, and an appropriate work ethic were formulated as gradual variations rather than representations of opposites (cf. Beatty 1999). These values were commonly linked directly to the earthquake *experience*: the disaster became a practical challenge for everyone to prove her or his strength of faith and quality of character in handling the crisis, as well as providing an opportunity for self-correction and improvement.

At the center of the religious discourse was the triad of acceptance, surrender, and effort, which was cosmologically deduced from divine omnipotence and the relative powerlessness of humans. These notions were construed as generalizable values and tangible life principles at the same time. Transcending the reductionist fatalism–control dichotomy, this triad offers an alternative to anthropocentric and control-biased coping theories. The positive potential of spiritual surrender has been discussed by Cole and Pargament (1999), who also point out the limits of the control paradigm:

> Because people are finite, because personal resources are bounded, and because the possibilities in any situation are necessarily limited, a preoccupation with personal control will often lead to frustration and failure. [. . .] Through spiritual surrender, control is abandoned for the sake of the sacred, be it a transcendental purpose, ideal, relationship, or commitment. In the process, however, both primary and secondary control may be inadvertently enhanced. (Cole and Pargament 1999, p. 184)

Cole and Pargament define a paradoxical relationship between control and surrender, where spiritual surrender is reached by giving up a sense of control, though the actual potential for control is regained by the relinquishing of its idea. If applied to the acceptance–surrender–effort triad, the basic description of the mechanism seems to match well, though it is doubtful that the notion of regained *control* would be supported from an emic perspective. Human effort (*usaha*) implies human attempt rather than control, meaning that humans give their all within the limits of their capacities. However, where their effort will lead to is unpredictable as we have illustrated with reference to the notion of *rezeki* as sustenance and luck.

Whether or not surrender leads to a paradox is a matter of cosmological assumptions. In this regard, psychological coping theory and hegemonic disaster research share the same referential frame: both privilege human control as a way of dealing with adversity and disaster. In Chap. 1 we discussed how this control bias is closely tied to a technocratic world view which promotes a security paradigm: human control, predictability, and security are construed as the norm, whereas disaster is construed as a disruption of normality, which needs to be corrected by regaining control and reestablishing security. As an alternative to this discourse on disaster as an exceptional disruption of normality, "Javanese," *kejawen*, Islamic, and Christian cosmologies offer an interpretative frame through which such large-scale destructive events are integrated into "expected normality" because human existence itself is seen as uncertain (cf. Macamo and Neubert 2008). Religious perspectives were thus rather reaffirmed by the earthquake than disrupted. At the same time, cosmologies are always multiple and in flux, and framing disaster is still a matter of interpretation and potentially contested. Different reference frames are available among and within different cosmologies (Schlehe 2010), as our case study has shown.

As with any other of our dimensions, religious coping needs to be studied in context because religion always interacts with material, social, and political conditions. Some religious discourses may be more convenient to the ruling political elite than others; some religious interpretations may foster social exclusion, others may foster integration; some religious frames may empower people to cope, while others may increase their burden. For a cultural psychology of coping, it is crucial to link subjective experiences and agency to the larger picture of religion, and to view the broader context through the lense of such subjective experiences. With respect to meaning-making, it seems promising to combine psychological meaning-making models with the more discursive approaches of an author like Schlehe, in order to situate meanings made in relation to the subjective life experiences, and micro-social contexts in relation to macro-political ones.

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