

Analysis of Community Knowledge on Disaster and the Effort to Construct A Disaster Theology

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Abstract. This paper explores local community knowledge on natural disaster, and aims to: 1) explaining community's response and strategy toward natural disaster based on their local knowledge; 2) to construct a disaster theology referring to theological understanding of the society about disaster based on their experience. This study is expected to contribute both to the development of knowledge on disaster management/risk reduction and as consideration for the stakeholders in policy decision making. Research for this paper was done in two areas in Ambon City, Maluku Province, namely *Negeri Batu Merah* and *Desa Galala*, which are prone to disaster and have had historical experience on it. The research using qualitative method with ethnoscience approach or paradigm, a particular knowledge systems of a community or society. The data collection was done through observation and indepth interview toward key informants from the study areas. Collected data were categorized, then presented by using descriptive-interpretative analysis. This research reveals that, first, community groups have particular knowledge about the disaster which sourced from their own experience as well as the experience of their ancestors in the past. The knowledge, which valuable for capacity building and adapt to natural disaster, has been handed down through generations. However, the knowledge is often disregarded by the people and the government, and replaced with scientific knowledge which is not yet well understood by the people. Second, the experience of the religious community is very important in constructing a disaster theology because, whether we realize or not, the religious people themselves interpret various disaster events, and reflect them to the certain religious teaching or scripture of their religion. This research finds that God's accompaniment is a basis for constructing a disaster theology based on disaster experience of people in Ambon.

Keywords: Disaster, Community Knowledge, Disaster Theology, God's Accompaniment

1 Introduction

Geographically and geographically Indonesia is located in a disaster-prone area. Even though almost all regions have a history of disasters, that still seem to be extraordinary and as if we never learn from past events. This can be seen in the disaster impact, which shows the lack of community preparedness to cope with disasters. In fact, the local community has a valuable and applicable knowledge of disaster to adapt and cope with. However, the knowledge is often disregarded by the people and the government. Previous studies on this topic show that each community has a particular and distinctive knowledge because it is related to the context and experience of each community (Indiyanto, 2012; Immanuel, 2013; Suryanti & Marfai, 2008; Sunarto, 2008; Veronica, 2013; Imron & Hidayat, 2012; Widiyanto, 2012). Thus, this study explores disaster knowledge of Ambonese who lives in a prone-disaster zone and has experienced natural disasters. In this study, we analyze how local culture, religion, and science affect people perception about disasters.

Some scholars in Indonesia discuss disaster theology from the Biblical perspective and contextual theology. Both the biblical and contextual theology assert suffering experienced by humans, due to either natural disasters or social disasters, and is directly related to the existence of Almighty God as a basis and centre in the discussion (Ngelow, 2006, 2007; Yewangoe, 2006; Erari, 2006; Cambell-Nelson, 2006; Fasya, 2006; Drewes, 2006; Marquarardt, 2006). Are there alternatives in understanding and constructing a disasters theology? Can we construct a disaster theology departing from locals knowledge and experience?

2 Research Question

1. How does the Ambonese knowledge of disaster refer to their context (religion, culture, science)?
2. Referring to the influence of religious knowledge/teachings in perceiving disasters, how is the construction of disaster theology based on locals knowledge and experience?

3 Method

The research conducted in two areas of Ambon City, Maluku Province, namely *Negeri Batu Merah* and *Desa Galala*, which are prone to disaster and have had historical experience on it. The research using qualitative method with ethnoscience approach or paradigm, a particular knowledge systems of a community or society. The data collection was done through observation and indepth interview toward key informants from the study areas. Collected data were categorized, then presented by using descriptive-interpretative analysis.

4 Results and Discussions

1. Disaster Knowledge of Ambon Society

The disaster knowledge could be explored through how the community response to disaster, includes perception, attitudes and strategies. In term religion, the people of Batu Merah (muslim) and Galala (christian) have a distinct perception about disaster. For Batu Merah community, disaster is God's wrath/anger over their sins and moral violations. The sins are perceived as their destructive acts on nature or environment. While for Galala people disaster is natural phenomena that purely caused by natural cycle and human

destructive act toward nature. They believe that God would never punish human through a disaster (tsunami) as God has promised to Noah after the great flood (Genesis 9:11). In addition to religious responses, prayer is a religious attitude for both of the communities. Prayer is their first religious response on disaster, and it is perceived as hope and strenght for live during the difficult moment of disaster.

Batu Merah community has a cultural response which is carried out when a disaster occurs. This response is known as the 'Bersih Kampung' or 'Cuci Negeri' tradition. Although the tradition has begun to fade and is forgotten by the younger generation today, the village elders practice it. While, in Galala people do not have such kind of traditional culture.

To anticipate the floods that usually occur, one of the strategies of the Batu Merah community is to clean up the river. To do this, the Batu Merah community took the initiative to form a river care group (*kelompok peduli sungai*) that regularly cleans the Way Batu Merah river around their homes. Another strategy undertaken by the Batu Merah community is to build an attic for storing goods in their homes during the rainy season.

In different to Batu Merah community, Galala people build strategies with government intervention through socialization and disaster simulation. Regarding the government's roles, it is more apparent in Galala community than Batu Merah community. While the community initiative is stronger in Batu Merah than Galala in building the strategy to cope with disaster.

2. Construction of A Disaster Theology

In general, disaster is associated with suffer. In this point, questions about the existence of God arise from the religious community. Based on the experience of communities in the context of the Bible, for example, found that wars which threaten the lives of people are associated with the wrath of God. Even certain sufferings that experienced by an individual and threaten his/her life arise statements such as "is this a punishment, how long has God allowed or turned away from it, and is this the love of God?" On the contrary, love and revelation of God's omnipotence are closely associated with victories, abundant harvests, and other forms of success that experienced by either individuals or a community.

Some theologians who study disaster theology depart from the experience of suffering, both in the biblical text and the experience of the people today, as a basis in constructing disaster theology. They see that the issue of theodicy becomes the centre of discussion in understanding and constructing disaster theology (Marquardt, 2006; Drewes, 2006; Ngelow, 2006;2007; Yewangoe, 2006; Cambell-Nelson, 2006; Fasya, 2006). In contrast to those scholars, we departing from the experience of people experiencing God's love in situations that threaten their lives.

According to us, discussing disaster theology can be started by focusing on the God's accompaniment to everyone who experiences disaster events. By doing so, everyone can see how much God loves both victims and survivors during natural disasters. By putting God's accompaniment in the center of theology, thus everyone has reason to look forward to a hopeful future, even in the difficult moment due to the natural disasters that they experience.

5 Conclusion

1. A community's knowledge about disasters affected by their life experiences in accordance with the social (culture, religion, etc.) context and environment where they live. The context differences of each community form different understandings. Ambonese people have local knowledge about disasters, and based on their past experiences on disasters, they are able to reflect and develop strategies to cope with disasters.
2. This research finds that God's accompaniment is a basis for constructing a disaster theology based on disaster experience of people in Ambon. Instead of questioning the absence of God during the disaster, the Ambonese people emphasize God's accompaniment in their lives, and their vocation to preserve nature as a gift of God.