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Religion-Based Resilience among Lapindo Mudflow-Affected Communities

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Abstract

This article examines the role of religion and religious institutions in strengthening community resilience among vulnerable residents affected by the Lapindo mudflow disaster in Glagaharum, Sidoarjo. The study responds to the tendency of disaster management to prioritize physical relocation, compensation, and technical mitigation while underestimating religious interpretation, local social capital, and faith-based institutions as resources for recovery. Using a qualitative community-based research design, the study involved affected residents, religious groups, and local community actors through interviews, participatory mapping, storytelling, focus group discussions, and logical framework analysis. The findings show that religion operates ambivalently in disaster contexts: it may reinforce fatalistic acceptance when disaster is interpreted only as divine destiny, yet it may also become transformative when religious meanings are reinterpreted as ethical motivation for collective action, livelihood recovery, environmental concern, and social solidarity. *Majlis taklim* and *jamiyah tahlil* functioned as social spaces where residents negotiated meaning, strengthened kinship, planned economic initiatives, and sustained communal resilience. The article contributes to Islamic studies by proposing transformative disaster theology as a bridge between Islamic moral interpretation, community-based disaster risk reduction, and resilience-building among vulnerable communities.

Keywords: Community-Based Research, Disaster Resilience, Islamic Studies, Lapindo Mudflow, Religious Institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The Lapindo mudflow disaster in Sidoarjo, East Java, has remained one of Indonesia's most complex socio-environmental disasters since the eruption began in Porong on 29 May 2006. Its impacts were not limited to physical damage, land loss, and displacement; they also disrupted social relations, livelihoods, psychological security, and the moral imagination of affected residents. Disaster governance in such a context cannot be reduced to technical mitigation or compensation because communities living near long-term hazards must continuously interpret risk, rebuild social meaning, and organize survival strategies. The Sendai Framework emphasizes a people-centered approach to disaster risk reduction, including risk understanding, governance, investment in resilience, preparedness, and recovery that builds back better (UNDRR, 2015). This global orientation is relevant to the Lapindo case because vulnerable residents require not only infrastructure and compensation, but also social, cultural, and religious resources that sustain their capacity to live with prolonged uncertainty.

The research object of this article is the role of religion and religious institutions in disaster recovery and resilience-building among vulnerable residents of Glagaharum, Sidoarjo. The original study located religion not merely as private belief but as a social institution embedded in everyday practices such as *yasinan*, *tahlil*, *majlis taklim*, and community-based religious gatherings. These institutions shaped how residents interpreted the mudflow, understood suffering, negotiated vulnerability, and imagined collective recovery. In Islamic studies, this issue is significant because Qur'anic narratives of disaster, patience, human responsibility, and environmental damage may produce different social orientations depending on how they are interpreted. Religious interpretation may encourage passive resignation, but it may also produce transformative ethics that motivate *ikhtiar*, mutual help, social accountability, and community empowerment (Aksa, 2020; Baidhawiy, 2015).

Previous studies on religion and disaster show that faith communities often provide moral language, trusted leadership, social networks, and practical assistance in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Gaillard and Texier (2010) argue that religion is inseparable from how communities understand natural hazards and disasters, while Aldrich

and Meyer (2015) demonstrate that social capital plays a critical role in disaster survival and recovery. More recent studies also indicate that faith-based organizations can fill institutional gaps in preparedness and recovery, especially when formal disaster governance is limited or uneven (Okyere et al., 2024; Prianto et al., 2023). In Indonesia, Muhammadiyah's experience in disaster management illustrates how Islamic organizations may translate theology into risk awareness, mitigation, and humanitarian work (Baidhawiy, 2015). Studies on religious and local wisdom in West Sumatra similarly show that community-based disaster management becomes stronger when local values are integrated into participatory risk reduction (Rozi et al., 2021).

Despite this growing literature, existing studies on the Lapindo mudflow have often emphasized compensation, environmental degradation, political economy, or social conflict, while the religious dimension of community resilience remains less systematically developed. Earlier research on the Lapindo-affected community documented that religious fatalism could simultaneously function as psychological resilience and as a potential barrier to structural transformation (Faizi & Putra, 2016). However, fewer studies have examined how local religious institutions can be repositioned as participatory spaces for critical reflection, livelihood recovery, and community organizing. This article addresses that gap by analyzing how religious meanings and institutions among Glagaharum residents were negotiated through community-based research and converted into practical resilience-building initiatives.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of transformative Islamic interpretation, vulnerability-oriented disaster studies, and community-based research. Rather than treating religion only as a coping mechanism or as a source of fatalism, the article argues that religion can become a transformative social resource when it is connected to critical reflection, collective action, and livelihood reconstruction. The objective is to analyze how textual and contextual religious interpretations influence residents' responses to the Lapindo mudflow, how religious institutions participate in disaster management, and what community initiatives emerge to strengthen resilience. The study contributes theoretically to Islamic studies by expanding the concept of disaster theology into a community empowerment framework and contributes practically by offering a model for integrating religious institutions into culturally grounded disaster risk reduction.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative community-based research design with a critical and interdisciplinary orientation. The design was appropriate because the research aimed not only to describe religious interpretations of the Lapindo mudflow but also to facilitate community reflection and strengthen local initiatives for resilience. Community-based research positions residents as co-producers of knowledge rather than passive research objects; therefore, the research process emphasized participation, dialogue, and collective formulation of problems and actions. The critical orientation was used to examine dominant disaster interpretations that positioned residents merely as victims and to encourage contextual religious meanings that support agency, solidarity, and transformation.

The research was conducted in Glagaharum Utara, Porong, Sidoarjo, particularly among residents living in RT 17 and RT 18 RW 04, an area close to the Lapindo mudflow embankment. The community consisted of approximately 70 households and around 240 residents, many of whom remained in the village despite continuing exposure to environmental and livelihood risks. Data sources included religious leaders, community figures, vulnerable residents, members of *majlis taklim*, *jamiyah tahlil*, and local residents involved in participatory discussions. A limited focus group discussion was held on 26 September 2025 at the house of a local key person, involving ten residents and producing agreement on the research background, problem formulation, theoretical orientation, and methodological process.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory mapping, storytelling, focus group discussions, and transect-based observation. Interviews were used to explore residents' religious interpretations, experiences of vulnerability, and perceptions of religious institutions. Participatory mapping was used to identify physical, social, economic, religious, and environmental assets in the community. Storytelling enabled residents to narrate local histories, memories of the disaster, successful survival strategies, and meanings attached to ancestral land and communal identity. Focus group discussions functioned both as data collection and as a dialogical space for community reflection. Although interactive religious learning sessions were initially planned, they could not be implemented because of financial limitations; this limitation was considered in interpreting the findings.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by logical framework analysis. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to religious fatalism, transformative Islamic interpretation, social capital, livelihood recovery, environmental concern, and collective resilience. Logical framework analysis helped organize the relationship between current conditions, community assets, planned actions, expected outcomes, and long-

term resilience. The analysis proceeded through four participatory stages inspired by asset-based community development: discovery, dream, design, and destiny. These stages enabled the researchers and residents to move from identifying existing vulnerabilities and assets toward planning economic, environmental, and organizational initiatives.

Credibility was strengthened through triangulation of data sources and techniques, including interviews, mapping, storytelling, focus group discussion, and community observation. Member checking was conducted informally during community discussions, where residents were able to confirm, question, or revise the interpretation of findings. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring voluntary participation, respecting residents' narratives, avoiding disclosure of sensitive personal information, and presenting the community not as passive victims but as active agents of resilience. Since the study did not involve clinical data or patient-identifying information, formal medical ethical approval was not required; however, the research process followed the principles of informed participation, confidentiality, and community respect.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Religion as Interpretation, Institution, and Action in Building Community Resilience

The findings indicate that religion operated through three interconnected layers: interpretation, institution, and action. At the interpretive level, residents initially understood the Lapindo mudflow through theological categories such as destiny, test, patience, and divine warning. At the institutional level, religious groups such as *majlis taklim* and *jamiyah tahlil* provided regular spaces for gathering, emotional support, and social bonding. At the action level, these religious networks supported residents' attempts to organize advocacy, strengthen food security, and develop livelihood alternatives such as catfish farming, bird breeding, goat raising, and handicraft activities. Table 1 summarizes the main thematic findings derived from the community-based research process.

Table 1: Thematic Findings from the Community-Based Research Process

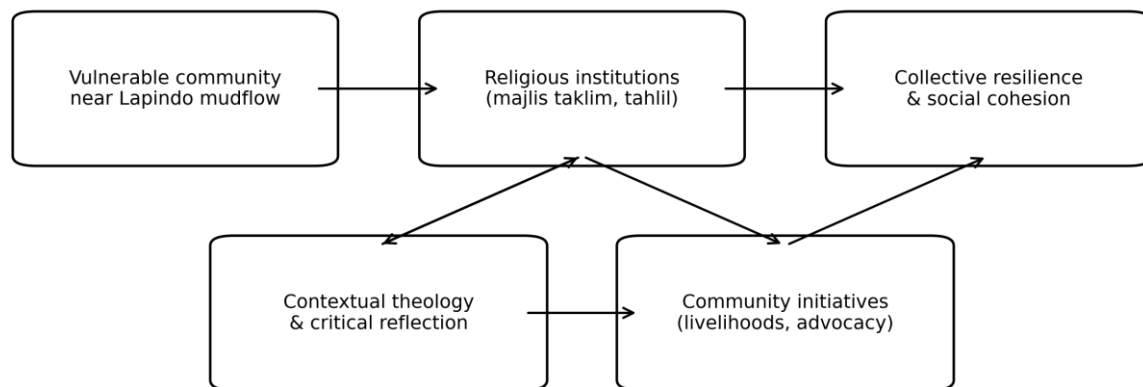
Research Focus	Empirical Pattern	Analytical Meaning
Religious interpretation of disaster	Residents interpreted the mudflow through ideas of destiny, trial, patience, and human responsibility.	Religious meaning was ambivalent: it could produce resignation, but it could also become a basis for ethical action and resilience.
Role of religious institutions	Majlis taklim and jamiyah tahlil created routine interaction, emotional support, and trusted spaces for discussion.	Religious institutions functioned as bonding social capital that strengthened solidarity and collective confidence.

Community initiatives	Residents planned livelihood and environmental initiatives, including catfish farming, vegetable cultivation, handicrafts, and advocacy for safe areas.	Resilience emerged when religious solidarity was translated into practical action for economic survival and environmental care.
Vulnerability and recovery	Residents remained exposed to environmental risks, declining agricultural land, water-quality problems, and uncertain livelihoods.	The vulnerability paradigm is more suitable than a hazard-only paradigm because it addresses structural and everyday risks.

Source: Researcher data processing results

As Table 1 shows, religious institutions did not function only as ritual spaces. They also provided social infrastructure through which residents discussed vulnerability, retained kinship solidarity, and formulated practical responses. This finding is consistent with the broader disaster literature that identifies social capital, local trust, and community networks as key elements of resilience (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Patel et al., 2017; Saja et al., 2019). However, the Glagaharum case adds an Islamic studies perspective by showing that social capital is not value-neutral; it is embedded

Figure 1. Analytical Model of Religion-Based Community Resilience



Source: Researcher data processing results

Figure 1 illustrates the analytical model developed from the findings. Vulnerable communities living near the Lapindo mudflow relied on religious institutions to mediate between theological interpretation and practical initiatives. Transformative resilience emerged when religious gatherings enabled critical reflection, mobilized social solidarity, and supported livelihood-oriented action.

Transformative Disaster Theology: From Fatalistic Interpretation to Community Resilience

The first major finding is that religious interpretation shapes the way affected residents understand disaster, but its social effect depends on whether theology is interpreted fatalistically or transformatively. In the hazard paradigm, disaster is often perceived as an extraordinary external event that requires technical response. The Glagaharum case shows that this paradigm is insufficient because residents' vulnerability is embedded in livelihood loss, environmental uncertainty, social displacement, and unresolved political-economic impacts. A vulnerability-oriented approach is therefore more appropriate because it asks why certain communities remain exposed and how their capacities can be strengthened (Wisner et al., 2004; Zakour & Gillespie, 2013). Within this framework, Islamic interpretation becomes important not because it replaces scientific explanation, but because it influences whether residents become passive recipients of aid or active agents of recovery.

The second major finding is that Islamic concepts of patience, trust in God, and divine destiny require contextual interpretation. When these concepts are detached from effort and responsibility, they may normalize suffering and weaken collective action. However, when they are connected to *al-ilmu*, *ikhtiar*, and *tawakkal*, they can support disaster awareness and reduce fatalistic attitudes (Aksa, 2020). This confirms recent Indonesian studies showing that local religious leaders can help transform disaster perception from passive acceptance into proactive mitigation and preparedness (Fatimahsyam, 2024; Muhasim, 2024). In the Lapindo context, residents did not abandon theological language; rather, they reworked it through everyday reasoning, social experience, and community deliberation. The result was a shift from viewing the disaster solely as destiny toward understanding it as a condition requiring organized struggle, livelihood adaptation, and communal responsibility.

The third major finding is that religious institutions functioned as social capital for resilience. *Majlis taklim*, *jamiyah tahlil*, and other religious gatherings provided regular interaction, shared emotional support, and a trusted basis for organizing. This is consistent with Aldrich and Meyer's (2015) argument that social networks provide access to information, assistance, and recovery resources during crises. In Glagaharum, kinship and religious association reinforced each other: the community's attachment to ancestral land, local history, and religious practice created a strong reason to remain and organize despite risk. This does not mean that staying in a hazardous area is automatically desirable. Rather, it shows that

resilience is shaped by social meaning, attachment, dignity, and the perceived availability of alternatives. Disaster governance that ignores these moral and relational dimensions risks misreading why communities remain in vulnerable locations.

The fourth major finding is that religion-based resilience becomes transformative when it produces concrete initiatives. The community-based research process identified livelihood alternatives such as catfish farming, vegetable cultivation, goat raising, bird breeding, and handicraft production. These initiatives were not merely economic activities; they represented efforts to rebuild agency after the loss of agricultural land and the narrowing of livelihood options. This finding aligns with community resilience literature emphasizing adaptive capacity, learning, self-organization, and transformation as essential pathways for reducing disaster risk (Imperiale & Vanclay, 2021; Ostadtaghizadeh et al., 2015; Saja et al., 2021). The Glagaharum case demonstrates that religious institutions can become entry points for such transformation when they are linked to participatory planning and local asset mobilization.

The fifth major finding concerns the policy implication of integrating faith-based institutions into disaster governance. Faith-based organizations are often trusted actors in local communities and can bridge the gap between formal disaster management systems and everyday community life (Ha, 2025; Okyere et al., 2024; Prianto et al., 2023). In Indonesia, this potential is particularly important because Islamic organizations and local religious groups are deeply embedded in community structures. Nevertheless, integration must be critical rather than romanticized. Religious institutions should not be used merely to legitimize government or corporate narratives, nor should religious language be used to depoliticize structural injustice. Instead, religious institutions should be supported as participatory spaces that strengthen risk literacy, environmental responsibility, livelihood adaptation, and community advocacy.

The final analytical contribution of this study is the concept of transformative disaster theology. This concept refers to a mode of Islamic interpretation that connects theological meaning with social agency, vulnerability reduction, and community empowerment. It differs from fatalistic theology because it does not stop at patience or acceptance. It also differs from purely technical disaster governance because it recognizes that recovery depends on meaning, trust, solidarity, and collective moral motivation. Transformative disaster theology therefore provides a conceptual bridge between Islamic studies and disaster risk reduction by showing how faith-based meaning can be translated into resilience-building practice.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed how religion and religious institutions contribute to disaster management and community resilience among residents affected by the Lapindo mudflow in Glagaharum, Sidoarjo. The findings show that religion has an ambivalent role: it may reinforce fatalistic acceptance when disaster is interpreted only as divine destiny, but it may become transformative when religious meanings are connected to ethical responsibility, collective action, livelihood recovery, and social solidarity. *Majlis taklim and jamiyah tahlil* functioned as social spaces where residents negotiated disaster meaning, strengthened kinship networks, and organized practical resilience initiatives.

Theoretically, this article contributes to Islamic studies by proposing transformative disaster theology as a framework for understanding how Islamic interpretation can support vulnerability reduction and community empowerment. Practically, the study suggests that religious institutions should be integrated into disaster governance not as symbolic legitimizers, but as trusted community actors capable of strengthening risk awareness, social cohesion, and local initiatives. The study is limited by its focus on one community and by the incomplete implementation of planned interactive religious learning activities. Future research should compare multiple Lapindo-affected communities, examine gendered dimensions of religious resilience, and evaluate the long-term sustainability of faith-based livelihood initiatives. Overall, the study affirms that religion can advance disaster resilience when it moves from passive consolation toward critical reflection, social organization, and transformative action.

Declaration of AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this revised manuscript, the authors used Chat GPT by OpenAI and Grammarly to assist with language refinement, grammar checking, academic phrasing, structural coherence, and alignment with the journal template. After using this tool, the authors reviewed, revised, and edited the content as needed. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity, accuracy, originality, and final version of the publication.

CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Ries Dyah Fitriyah: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing - Original Draft, and Writing - Review & Editing.

M. Hanafi: Investigation, Resources, Validation, and Writing - Review & Editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work. Example Format:

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. Since this research is based on qualitative community-based research, the data consist of field notes, participatory mapping outputs, focus group discussion notes, storytelling records, and documentary materials used in the analysis.

Funding Statement

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The study was conducted independently by the authors.

Ethical Approval Statement

The authors confirm that this study adheres to ethical research standards. The research did not involve patients, clinical data, or patient-identifying information. Participation in community discussions and interviews was voluntary, and personal information was not disclosed in the manuscript. Therefore, formal medical ethical approval was not required.

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