

Atonement and appeasement rituals as a platform for intra-group reconciliation

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Reconciliation through rituals

Rituals of atonement and appeasement, prevalent across cultures, **reinforce belief in supernatural punishment** and offer a platform for reconciliation and trust restoration.

These public rituals allow transgressors to **communicate their awareness of wrongdoing** and **intent to conform to shared norms**, thus managing their reputation.

Historic and ethnographic evidence shows these rituals are invoked during crises, **linking misfortunes to moral breaches** and prompting corrective actions.

The form of these rituals varies, reflecting both **specific local norms** and **generalized moral concerns**, with some theological systems emphasizing ongoing atonement to avert eternal punishment.

See also Kundtová Klocová, E. (2023). Appeasing the (minds of) gods. *Religion, Brain & Behavior*, 14(2), 214-216.

Research

For this type of rituals to exist, it is necessary for people to **believe that god(s) can be angry** with them, that he **can punish** them, but also that his **anger can be appeased**.

In this initial step, I examine whether these intuitions exist.

In future research I aim to explore the characteristics of such rituals, their effectiveness, and the specific mechanisms through which they help restore trust and cooperation.

Mauritian kavadi as atonement



A kavadi attam participant with facial and body piercings carrying a burden during the procession to the temple. (Grand Baie 2022)

Personal justifications for participating in *kavadi attam* include a sense of **moral failure**, a **violation of religious and social rules**. Undergoing the pain associated specifically with thoughts of personal moral failure can lead to relief from the paralyzing sense of guilt.

At the same time, participation in this ritual is often understood as a **supplication for the removal of obstacles**, misfortunes, illnesses, accidents, all of which are also perceived as **signs of god's anger**.

See also: Fibiger, M. Q. (2018). Thaipusam Kavadi – A Festival Helping Hindus in Mauritius Cope with Fear. *International Quarterly for Asian Studies*, 49(3-4), 123-140.

Study of god's anger intuitions in Mauritius

Free-list exploratory study

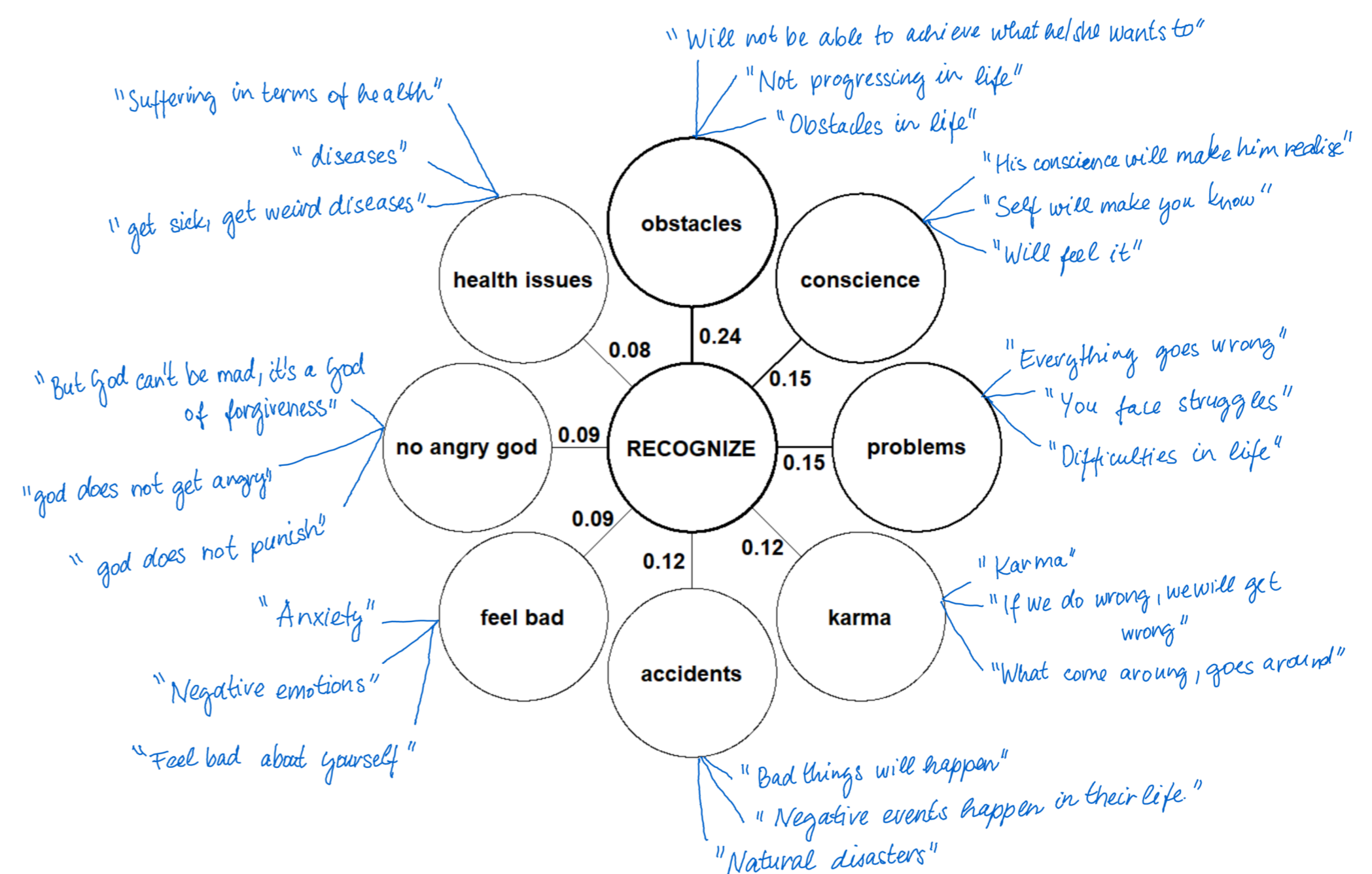
Participants (N=211, 94 females, Mage=39.7) were recruited by local research assistants (in Mauritius) from the streets and asked to list freely responses to two questions concerning god's anger (how to recognize it and how to rectify it).

Flower graphs (below) show coded responses and their mean salience score (Smith's S).*

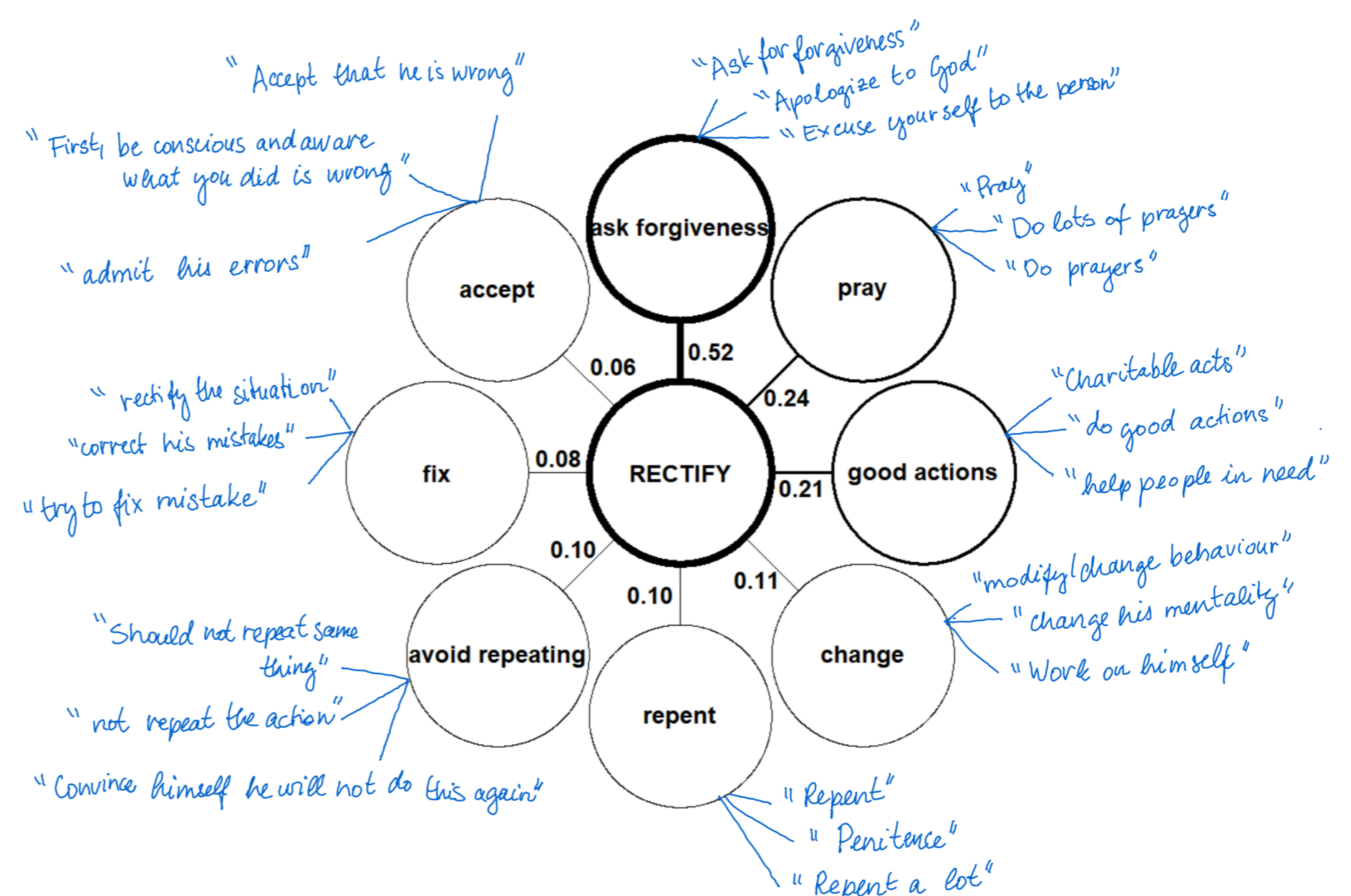
*Analysis and graphs made with the use of AnthroTools package for R. (Purzycki, & Jamieson-Lane, 2017)

Intuitions about god's anger in Mauritius

"How can anyone recognize that god is angry with them?"



"If someone does something wrong that angers god, what can they do to rectify it?"



Conclusions

- People perceive god's anger in their **personal life** through obstacles, problems in various areas, sudden and severe illnesses or accidents.
- Appeasement of the anger requires **individual change** but also takes place in the **social domain**: apologies (to victims), showing remorse publicly (e.g. through rituals), doing charity work, and helping others.

