



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

After the tsunami : the remaking of everyday life in Banda Aceh, Indonesia

Samuels, A.

Citation

Samuels, A. (2012, November 29). *After the tsunami : the remaking of everyday life in Banda Aceh, Indonesia*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20190>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/20190>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/20190> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Samuels, Annemarie

Title: After the tsunami : the remaking of everyday life in Banda Aceh, Indonesia

Date: 2012-11-29

Chapter two

Bodies out of place: time, narrative and tsunami experience

I found that the making of the self was located, not in the shadow of some ghostly past, but in the context of making the everyday inhabitable. Thus, I would suggest that the anthropological mode of knowing the subject defines it in terms of the conditions under which it becomes possible to speak of experience.

– Veena Das 2007: 216 –

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the post-tsunami reconstruction arena and the particular subjectivities that it allowed to emerge. In this chapter I turn to experiences of the tsunami, asking how people in Banda Aceh narrated and embodied tsunami experience. How, I ask, are tsunami experiences temporal processes, in which time is an actor in relation to persons who subjectively create and deal with these experiences? Experience is, among other things, what makes up people's lifeworlds. In the phenomenological tradition, scholars have pointed out how personal experience is always embodied (Desjarlais and Throop 2011; see for example Csordas 1990) and emerges in relation to past experiences and a social-cultural context and thus in a limited "range of possibilities" (Zigon 2010). All personal experience is unique (Zigon 2010), but, through the shared socio-cultural elements it is also the intersubjective medium that makes up social life (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991). As Veena Das (epigraph) and others have made clear, experience is situated in the present; making and remaking the everyday.

In this chapter I focus on narrative experiences (Steadly 1993) of the tsunami in the present (the time of fieldwork) as a central part of remaking everyday life. Steedly finds that experience is "both generated and shaped by tropes and conventions, by the borrowed plots, moods, rhythms, and images of other stories and other people's words." (1993: 23). While in the next chapter I look at narratives about the process of grieving, in this chapter the stories about the tsunami are central. I find that the body, in different ways, assumes a central place in these narrative experiences. It does so not only in the now common anthropological and phenomenological understanding that all experience is embodied and necessarily starts from the body, but also because many people narrated the tsunami as a highly sensory and physical event impacting on and transforming not only one's own body but also the bodies of many others. Although the tsunami experiences in general inform the content of this chapter, I will focus particularly on embodiment and the body, because, as I will suggest, it is the experience of bodies 'out-of-the-ordinary' that frames the

‘eventness’ of the disaster in relation to the re-emerging ordinariness of everyday life (cf. Das 2007).

Critical disability studies have challenged notions of the body as an autonomous and independent ‘whole’ by showing how it is “uncontainable, leaking and flowing into the world” (Gibson 2006: 195) and how the subject is unstable and unbounded, a ‘becoming’ in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari (Biehl and Locke 2010, Gibson 2006). The body, therefore has to be ‘thought’ relationally and its normative wholeness and health should always be problematized (Spyer 2006c). I therefore approach the narratives of bodies out-of-the-ordinary that come forward in this chapter not as contrasting to the body as contained and static, but as constructed in relation to notions of the ‘ordinary’ and normative body that are continuously created and recreated. Moreover, the embodied experiences that I analyze in this chapter themselves point at the fluidity of the body that is “entangled and enmeshed, acting upon and being acted upon in material life worlds of differing character and composition” (Spyer 2006c: 125).

Experience, for most anthropologists, is fundamentally cultural, as it is always part of a person’s being in the world. Stories are ways of giving meaning to experience (Garro and Mattingly 2000) and although “experience always far exceeds its description or narrativization” (Good 1994: 139), narrative is more than just one way of representing experience. Cheryl Mattingly, following Jerome Bruner, shows how narrative is fundamental to our sociability, to our capacity to understand others through what she calls “narrative mind reading” (2008). Narrative is then not only central to everyday life, it is also crucial to the making and remaking of lifeworlds. As Byron Good puts it: “(...) narrative, the imaginative linking of experiences and events into a meaningful story or plot, is one of the primary reciprocal processes of both personal and social efforts to counter this dissolution and to reconstitute the world.” (Good 1994: 118).

Narrative not only represents experience, but creates it as well, in the process of mutual shaping that Mary Steedly calls narrative experience (1993). This shaping of experience in the present involves not only recounting the past from the position of the present, but also organizing experience in relation to the future (Good 1994: 139). Importantly, then, in narration something is always at stake; as people want to communicate something they move through past experience and moral and cultural frameworks in an intersubjective sphere. Moreover, what is at stake in the tsunami narratives, as we will see in both this chapter and the next, is also the need to give experience a meaning, or a plot, that makes post-tsunami life livable and that, in doing so, allows people to move on.

Experience and narrative are fundamentally temporal, bringing together different times and temporalities. In the words of Paul Ricoeur (1984: 3): “Time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience.” Robert

Desjarlais (2003) points out how the ‘narrative event’ and the ‘narrated event’, the ‘narrated I’ and the ‘narrative I’ bring different times together in the act of narration. And it is the work of time that crucially shapes this process (Das 2007: 80). As Veena Das (*op. cit.* 97) argues: “the simultaneity of events at the level of phenomenal time that are far apart in physical time make the whole of the past simultaneously available.” The temporalities of the narrating I and the narrated I are “braided together in the telling.” (*op. cit.*: 75). By paying attention to the ways in which time and narrative shape experience, as well as how experience shapes narrative, I am not only looking for “certainties, coherences, and structures”, but also for “the ambiguities, the confusions, the gaps, and the ambivalences” as these form experiences as lived (Throop 2010a: 3). A discussion about rumor in the second part of this chapter will draw attention to these gaps and to the “subjunctivizing elements” (Good 1994) in narratives that point at the uncertainty and ambiguity of everyday lived experience; with ‘subjunctivity’ pointing, in my analysis, especially to the multiple readings and the different possible futures that the narratives of lost children entail.

In this chapter I aim to do two things that ultimately bring together the ‘narrated event’ of the tsunami and the ‘narrative event’ of the conversations I had with people about the tsunami, through a focus on the body in experience. Firstly, I want to show how the narrative experience of out-of-placeness of bodies and things emerges as a cultural narrative that categorizes the event of the tsunami as “out of the ordinary” (Das 2007) – and how this narrative at the same time renews the sense of what the ordinary should be. The working of time and temporality is crucial to this process. Secondly, I intend to make clear how the embodied narration of the tsunami becomes part of the embodied experience of the tsunami itself, showing how the out-of-the-ordinary event becomes part of the body as narrative experience. In the following section I will attend closely to parts of the narratives of two tsunami survivors. Subsequently, I focus on the bodies out-of-place that are central to many tsunami stories and on the embodied act of narration itself. The final section will analyze what rumors of child trafficking do in the post-tsunami situation. There I argue that the missing bodies of children and rumors that children were trafficked became part of experiences of hope and anxiety in an uncertain and open-ended reality.

The ‘event’ of the tsunami⁸⁶

This section discusses parts of the tsunami stories of two people as they told them to me in the context of interviews. I focus on the detailed accounts of the tsunami itself and

⁸⁶ In the last decades scholars have started to treat disasters as processes rather than events, since a natural hazard becomes a disaster only because of historically constructed social vulnerabilities (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 2002). Here, following Veena Das (2007), I use the word event as it emerges in narratives in relation to the ‘ordinary’. My use of this word is thus intimately tied to the act of narration, rather than to an analysis of the disaster itself.

especially on the role of the body and the senses in these stories, since these are so salient and striking in them. I will start with the story of a young woman, Dita.

The story of Dita: running without shoes

Dita was in her early twenties when I met her in 2009. She lived with her husband, whom she married after the tsunami, and their one year old baby in a regular tsunami aid house in a neighborhood near the coast that had been totally destroyed by the waves. Their house stood next to the tsunami aid house that had been given to her parents, who lived there with her younger brothers and sister. An older brother was working in another part of Indonesia. Both of her grandparents, who had lived on the spot where her house now stood, died in the tsunami. One afternoon in 2009 I did an interview with her in which we talked about the tsunami and post-tsunami reconstruction process. We were sitting in the house of her parents, who had gone out to sell *pisang goreng* (fried bananas), as they did every afternoon. Her husband had gone out to work as well, while Dita stayed at home with the baby. I quote a part of my interview with her, the part in which she spoke about the tsunami, at length:

Dita: At the moment of the earthquake, we were in the house. It did not take us long to get outside. We sat in front of the house. We sat here, everybody sat here, in front [of the house]. My parents came home from the market straight away. Everybody was talking with each other. People from the kampong all gathered here. People from behind our house and from the front. Suddenly, I don't know, there was the sound of an explosion, the sound of an explosion, *baaaam*. There was water water water from behind, I don't know, indeed it was the sea, *aduh* the water was like a snake, the water, like a snake (*ge ular*).

My younger brothers and sister were all running. During the tsunami we did not meet with our parents, everybody was running for him/her self. We let go (*lepas*) of each other and were running individually (*lari masing masing*). It was only after two days that we saw our parents again.

Annemarie: Did you run by motorcycle?

Dita: No, no, we were just running, with our own feet. Normally I am the slowest. Everybody, even my parents were surprised that they saw me again. That I was safe. The point is that they did not know it.

A: So you were running alone?

D: Yes we were running alone, there were six of us. My younger brother fled by bicycle. Another went by motorcycle with a friend. The others, we were just running.

A: Where did you run to?

D: I ran all the way up to the crossing with neighborhood L, a bit further than the mosque. I am surprised that I could run and run. I did not wear the kind of clothes that I'm wearing now; I was wearing my nightgown. Sorry to say this, but I did not wear pants; just a *sarong* and a t-shirt. [I had not combed] my hair; I had just woken up and was doing household tasks.

A: So did you run immediately then?

D: I did not run straight away. I looked to the left and the right and there was water everywhere. [Along the way] there were many people who could not run. [They said] 'ya Allah, please help me sister, help me'; there were children, but how could we have helped them?

A: You were running.

D: Yes, I was running, I did not have time to help other people. I thought that this was a sign of the end of the world (*kiamat*). I thought everything would be gone.

A: Eventually, you were not hit by the water, were you?

D: Only a few drops of water; the water came like a snake, but did not even touch my feet.

A: That is how far you ran...

D: I never thought that I could run that fast. If I would have come from my alley a bit later, perhaps I would not be here anymore. I never imagined that I could run like that. If I would have to do it again now perhaps I would die. I could not run like that.

A: How about the others?

D: The others all ran. But many of them did not survive, you know why? It was not [only] because of the water, but also because of the many accidents. People were running everywhere and there were many accidents. Especially with children. I pity the children. I did not help them, I did not help them, we could not.

A: You could not do it then.

D: I could not help them. [They said] 'help me miss, oh help me miss.' We were running without shoes. That is what we normally see on the television, from abroad, right? On television. We were like that.

The stories that people told me give us insight into the ways in which experience is shaped through narrative, how the past can only get shape in the subjective act of making a story. Many people who told me their stories emphasized that 'other people have a different story' (*lain orang lain cerita*). Yet difference here means that there is the possibility of comparison and of sameness. Although all personal experience is unique, narration (and thus shaping experience) happens through cultural contexts, through shared elements of these contexts. Thus, while acknowledging that experience is always diverse, since "[n]o one experiences something in the same way as anyone else" (Hollan 2012), we can still look

at patterns that shape personal experiences in narratives. In Dita's story the narrated 'I' and the narrated 'we' are invoked at different moments. She refers not only to her own experience; the story speaks to the experiences of others as well. One commonality is that these stories could be understood as 'stories' in the first place and importantly, their particular elements as well as their general designation as tsunami stories (*cerita tsunami*), could be understood by others. Not only by those who had experienced the tsunami, but also by relative outsiders like myself. In this way the 'tsunami story' became a genre, confirmed not only in everyday conversations and in interactions with me as a researcher but also in published testimonials such as the volume *Tsunami dan Kisah Mereka*,⁸⁷ which bundles more than one hundred personal accounts of the tsunami, and personal stories published annually in local newspapers upon the tsunami anniversary – such as the *mengenang tsunami* series published in the newspaper Serambi Indonesia in December 2011.

I quoted my conversation with Dita here to get to some of the elements that make her narrative an embodied, intersubjective act. My choice of the stories to tell in this chapter is guided by my intention to reflect on the body and experience in tsunami narratives, an intention that acquired shape somewhere in the course of hearing and analyzing these stories and finding that the body and the senses were crucial in the recollection of the tsunami as well as in the performance of narration. One of the things that strike me most in Dita's story is the running. She tells how she ran faster than she ever thought she could. In fact she thinks she would not be able to do it again – a feeling that other people explained to me as well. The embodied memory is explicit in her account: her loose hair, nightgown and bare feet; the cries for help and the many accidents; running like never before amidst all those people and yet the experience of running alone; everyone for him or herself (*masing masing*), after letting go (*lepas*) of her family.

In his life stories of two of Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists, Robert Desjarlais beautifully shows how people live their lives through their senses and how they do so in different ways. Adopting Herzfeld's (2001) notion of sensory semiosis, he shows how experience through different senses takes shape for different people, at different times, in cultural contexts and through individual lives. One of his conclusions that inform my analysis in the present chapter then is that "sensate engagements have both personal and cultural strands to them." (Desjarlais 2003: 341). Let us now look at Dita's story in detail to focus on the centrality of the body and the senses in the tsunami experience and the ways in which her story is framed through past experience and cultural metaphors, narratives, and moralities.

Dita used several metaphors, such as the water being like a snake and its sound being like an explosion, to narrate her experience. Other often used metaphors were that of the water rising as a huge black wall or that being in the water was like being in a blender.

⁸⁷ Badan Arsip Propinsi Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, Banda Aceh, 2005.

Kirmayer notes how metaphors are bodily and socially grounded “tools for working with experience” (1992: 335). They “allow for inventive play, despite the dual constraints of body and society, by requiring only piecemeal correspondences to the world through ostension.” (*op. cit.*: 323). Because of this quality, metaphors are frequently used to articulate experiences that are fragmentary in nature and cannot be expressed within the coherence and temporality of narrative (Kirmayer 2000, see also Throop 2010a). People frequently drew on metaphors to express tsunami experiences. Above we saw some examples of metaphors (blender, snake, black wall, sound of an explosion) and later in this chapter I will draw attention to other metaphors, for example descriptions of the lining up of the dead bodies as ‘fish’ drying in the sun. The frequent use of metaphor here seems to be tied to the extraordinariness of the event, a coherent narrative not being the only or the best way to capture its meaning. Rather, the use of the metaphors suggests that one has to reach to something ‘out of the ordinary’ to describe it.

As referred to above, the main point that I want to bring out in this chapter is the centrality of the out-of-the-ordinary body to the out-of-the-ordinary experience that emerges from many tsunami stories. The out-of-the-ordinary experience of one’s own and other bodies not only defines the ‘eventness’ of the tsunami against an ‘ordinary’ before and the remaking of the ‘ordinary’ everyday. It is also through the embodied experiences as shaped through stories as well as other symbolic forms (Throop 2010a) that the past event becomes part of the everyday. While this chapter focuses mainly on narratives of the tsunami, subsequent chapters also pay attention to other symbolic forms of remembering and experiencing the tsunami, especially in the context of grieving (chapter three) and urban space (chapter four).

Dita emphasized how she was running by herself, but she was also aware of others around her. She knew that her brothers and sisters were running as well, even though they were not together. She also told me about the children in traffic accidents and the voices calling for help. Not only for help in general, but really addressing her. In her story she realizes that she cannot help them; her only chance for survival is to keep running. Her survival through running becomes layered with the death of those who asked for her help, the people whom she had to leave behind. As the ‘sensate engagements’ have both personal and cultural strands in them, so does the narrative. “I did not help them, we could not.” And “I could not help them.” The narrative is an act of moral sensibility. Helping others would be good. Individuality or ‘everyone for themselves’ (*masing masing*) was often commented upon as something bad, not only occurring during the tsunami, but also as a characteristic of moral degradation in the post-tsunami society. Dita emphasized that it was impossible to ‘help them’, thereby highlighting the moral predicament as well as softening the possible moral implications of what she did not do. “I” and “we” change

places. She was not the only one; nobody could help. Saving her own life was the only thing she *could* do.

Like everything else in the social world, experience is gendered. Dita emphasized her dress; her loose hair, her nightgown, no shoes. Her appearance was unproblematic as long as she was in and around the house doing her household tasks on a Sunday morning. Yet, for running in the streets, she did, at least in retrospect, feel highly uncomfortable with it. She even excused herself for telling about it. Her “sorry to say this”, interrupted her narrated I, directly addressing me. I wonder what she would have said (or not said) to a male interviewer. What I do know is that many women reflected on their ‘inappropriate’ appearances during the tsunami and in the days thereafter (see below). In interviews with me at least, men hardly ever did so (although they did comment on the bodies and appearances of others). Women’s morality, especially through visual expression in dress, is an important issue in post-tsunami Aceh and the gendered tsunami narrative experiences are one way in which its influence on women’s subjectivities becomes apparent.

Dita makes her disaster experience resonate with the many other disasters “that we normally see on television”. This reference gives this disaster a certain status as well as an importance that signals its out-of-the-ordinariness. Mary Steedly (2000: 811) writes: “News from afar sometimes seems to bear an uncanny resemblance to one’s own remembered past. This is not because of the banal redundancy of events but because of memory’s inclination to refurbish itself in contemporary designs and novel images.” This is indeed what I observed several times when disasters elsewhere made people remember their experiences during the tsunami.⁸⁸ Interestingly, telling about the tsunami also triggered the memory of other images to refurbish itself in a global imaginary. In one way to create intersubjective understanding, Dita calls to mind those “images that we normally see on television” of people running with bare feet that she assumes I have seen as well. Rather than referring to a particular other disaster, she refers to an image that globally, or at least for both of us, represents disaster and thus presumably makes me understand something of her experience. In a similar way, one woman, right in the middle of a very emotional recall of how she tried to survive by climbing Banda Aceh’s main mosque, told me that this was definitely “much worse than the Titanic.”

Pak Jamaluddin’s story: the sound of prayer

Let me continue with another story about tsunami experience, that of Pak Jamaluddin. Pak Jamaluddin was a fishmonger before the tsunami, living with his wife and daughter in a rental house near Banda Aceh. He lost both his wife and his daughter in the disaster. I often met Pak Jamaluddin as we lived in the same neighborhood. On an afternoon in December 2008, I did an extensive interview with him, from which I quote some parts at length below.

⁸⁸ For example when the Siti Gintung dam on Java collapsed on the 27th of March 2009.

In his story, again, the body and embodiment are central to the experiences that he narrates. Especially the moments of physical separation from his wife and daughter seem to be shot through with pain.

Pak Jamaluddin told me that he was at the market when the earthquake began. He immediately returned home. Suddenly, people said that the water was rising and together with his wife and daughter he ran to the back of the house.

Everybody was running... we ran to a place where a house was under construction. It would be a big, two-story, house. There I was, with my child and my wife. I held onto my child and I held onto my wife. My wife was six months pregnant with our second child. Everything was falling down. Because we are Muslims, we were praying. And then the water came. The water came and we did not see anything.

My wife and I were separated, because I could not hold on to her any longer. Let's run, she said. I could not go any further, I was tired. Then the water came. It was five meters high and I had to let her go (*sudah lepas sama saya*). I was still holding onto my child. I held her above my head so she would not drown, like this [he shows me how he carried her]. She called 'daddy, daddy!' I could not ..., she was so small. And then the second wave came. I was separated from my child (*lepas sama anaknya*). The water took me at least one kilometer inland. I held onto some wood on a heap of rubbish. There I rested, I was so tired. The sun was burning. It was around 12 o'clock and I could not stay there. There was a house from which I heard a voice, praying; it was a Muslim. So I crossed the water to the house and they helped me to get out of the water. We felt abandoned. After that, I climbed upstairs and they gave me water and bread. I drank, my body was so weak. I climbed to the second floor and there I could rest. I left the house, my body hurt (*sudah badan sakit*).

He was severely wounded but with the help of some friends he managed to reach his home village, after which he stayed in hospitals (first in Medan and later in Lhokseumawe) for several weeks to recover. He could not search for his family but asked his friends to look for his wife and daughter. Their bodies were never found. After a year he returned to Banda Aceh. In the first year, he told me, he could not go back because of the memories, the trauma. He did not dare to. Later he returned for short periods, before settling permanently in the city. He had to change his profession:

I worked in a motorcycle repair shop and later again as a fishmonger. But after five months I had to take a rest because I fell ill. I remembered them... I thought of my family. With every child that passed by I imagined that it was my daughter. Now she would be eight years old. She was five years old at the time. That made me ill.

The feeling of physical separation from his wife and daughter, his own wounded body and illness, the burning sun and the sounds of Islamic prayer; just like Dita, Pak Jamaluddin told me a detailed story of sensory experience. The experiences of sounds, other bodies, feelings of heath, physical wounds and 'abandonment' structure his narrative. Some parts, such as the letting go (*lepas tangan*) of children and the sounds of prayer are reflected in many other stories – part of a narrative framework of collective experiences that evolves as an ever changing structure that informs individual narrations and through which narratives are given cultural meaning. Time is again a crucial actor. The story is told in light of the difficult years that followed and in which Pak Jamaluddin suffered from the embodied wounds of the tsunami – the loss, 'trauma' and memories as well as the severe injuries from which he slowly recovered.

The age of his daughter; five when she died, eight if she had still lived marks the difference in 'physical time', at the same time as it forcefully brings together the narrating I and the narrated I, the present of narration and the past experience. He talks about losing her in the waves, enacts how he held her above his head; and he talks about imagining her every time a young girl passes by. The 'narrated I' throughout the years is remembered, re-told and re-lived by the narrating I. The body, emotions, reflections and memories together form the narrating I who articulates experience in narrative. Rather than being somehow separate processes, embodiment and testimonial narrative are part of the same process of living culturally – of dealing with experience in the everyday, with the past in the present, with the out of the ordinary in the remaking of everyday life.

As in Dita's narrative, morality was important in Pak Jamaluddin's story. He also emphasized the impossibility of saving his wife and daughter. Yet, the moment that he was helped by others was crucial as well. The sound of prayer was his first contact with other survivors. He emphasized that it was an Islamic prayer, even though in the part of Aceh Besar where he lived there were only very few people with another religion. At least part of the reason for saying this would be that he told the story to me, a non-Muslim. Before, he had also said: "we are Muslims." Yet hearing the sound of prayer as such was also an element that returned in many stories, in a way signaling the beginning of recovery, coming out of the water, surviving the disaster.

Bodies out of place

In this section I will look at the stories of the tsunami through the one element that seems to be so defining to the disaster: the bodies – dead, naked, wounded, changed, transformed, untended; out of the ordinary.

Dead bodies

One afternoon in March 2009, a friend of mine arranged an interview with one of his neighbors, Pak Baiquni, a man in his late forties. The conversation was informal; we were sitting in front of his house and some younger men were hanging out there in the late afternoon and joined in the conversation. Pak Baiquni immediately told me that for him it was difficult to talk about the tsunami. He said: "What happened... when I remember that, it is difficult for me. Because when I remember the tsunami, I am sad." He mentioned all the people he lost; a large part of his family. He then went on to recall some very painful memories: "Sad, sad, everything is sad. Indeed at the time of ... when I came out from the water, that was sad, when family members embraced me. I was alone, perhaps I have been given a long life." Later he told me about the dead bodies: "I was taken 500 meters far [by the water] into a house. People died and were hit by the corpses. (...) I just wanted to say that that was the saddest thing, to end up on top of the dead bodies."

These were almost the only things he said about the tsunami. As he had said at the outset, talking about it was difficult. But he did speak about these two moments that were so sad (*sedih*). In the embrace of his surviving family members he remembers the pain of those whom he lost. The 'saddest' thing was to end up on top of the dead bodies; the dead and the living touching in the water.

In Banda Aceh, approximately 60,000 people died. Corpses were everywhere; on the roads, in houses, mosques and gardens; stuck in barbed wire, in trees, on gates. When I asked people what Banda Aceh looked like right after the tsunami, almost everyone talked about the corpses. But more often the horrible sight of corpses that were described as being like rubbish (*seperti sampah*), drying like fish (*seperti ikan*) or forming mountains (*bergunung gunung*) had come up long before I could ask such a question. Sometimes people mentioned how many corpses had been found in their own house or neighboring houses. Rarely people recognized the bodies they found in their own houses, as they had come from neighborhoods many kilometers away.

Moreover, people said, the bodies had changed so much that they had become almost unrecognizable. They were black from the dirty water and swollen, as some people told me, like refrigerators (*seperti kulkas*). Parts of the bodies had been cut off, some were beheaded. Often they were naked; clothes had been ripped off. A good friend told me how, while looking for her family members, she covered the private parts of the corpses one by one with any cloth available. A middle-aged man who found the body of his daughter in a tree kept emphasizing that she still had her clothes on; this was highly exceptional. Others told me how, because of the unrecognizability of the bodies, they looked for other signs: color of the clothing that was left, accessories, jewelry, hair, teeth, birthmarks, scars. Cut Marliani, one of my friends and interlocutors whose story I will discuss extensively in the next chapter, explained:

The corpses (*jenazah*) of many people had changed. They were swollen and the faces had changed so that they had become difficult to recognize and it was hard to identify them. But perhaps people could find out because a person was wearing a ring. There were also birthmarks, or people could know because of the hair or perhaps because of the form of the nails. Then we could know.

Cruelly, jewelry could also lead to further mutilation. Many people told me how after the tsunami 'outsiders' from Medan and elsewhere came to Aceh to steal. They stole the furniture and other goods from abandoned houses and the gold from dead bodies. When the fingers and wrists were too swollen, so people told me, hands and fingers would be cut off.

Retrieval and gathering of unidentified corpses was often left to Red Cross volunteers and other aid workers. Some people gathered corpses in their streets, piled them up and covered them with cloths. Many corpses were brought to mosques, where people came to look for missing family members. Some people commented on the smell of the corpses. Others said that it was striking that the corpses did not smell. Some explained this as caused by the salty water of the sea. One middle aged woman told me: "After five days the corpses were dry. They did not smell. There were no flies. Normally if there is a dead body, there are flies, but there weren't any, why is that? Perhaps they were drying in the sun, like salted fish."

The role of smell is often under-represented in anthropological accounts (Herzfeld 2001), but often mentioned in relation to corpses. Generally, discussions about smell deal with its (good or bad) presence, rather than its absence. It is interesting that many people mentioned the lack of bad smell of the corpses, emphasizing its absence. It signals the importance of smell for experience and here in particular of the experience people had with the many dead bodies. It was not only an experience of vision, but also one of touch (when searching for the bodies of family members but also being 'hit' by corpses in the water as Pak Baiquni described), and of smell.

Many people used the metaphor of the bodies being like fish, drying in the sun or being shoveled up by trucks to be put in mass graves. Like fish, the bodies had come from the water. The metaphor may be a form of distancing in the narrative, or even a form of non-narrative (Kirmayer 2000). But if so, the non-narrative expression is only a temporary distancing, as people continued to tell about the real corpses they saw; about the landscapes of corpses lined up in the mosques as well as what they looked like when one passed them and turned them around to look for familiar signs. Many survivors who were searching among the dead described their own extra-ordinary embodied sensations – of lacking hunger and thirst, of never getting tired and not caring about their own bodily appearance

or performance or even acting 'like crazy', as well as getting beyond any fear or anxiety when looking at so many transformed corpses. The border between dead and alive was not always obvious, as bodies that had been assumed to be dead for days suddenly woke up and the living slept among the corpses.

The latter was the experience of Pak Hamdani, who told me that on the day of the tsunami he was out of town, visiting relatives in an inland village. On the second day he drove back to Banda Aceh, where he arrived late at night to find his house severely damaged. In the total darkness he looked for a place to sleep and together with a friend he decided to sleep in front of a mosque where it seemed rather crowded. Only the next morning they found out that they had been sleeping amongst corpses. Other people told me how they did know that they were sleeping amongst corpses near the mosque the first nights, but that they really did not have another choice because they had nowhere to go.

Most unidentified corpses were collected and buried in mass graves in the following months, but months and even years after the tsunami corpses were still found. The memory of unknown corpses being found in one's house and street sometimes still influenced some very everyday activities, even years after the disaster. Many people remembered exactly where the corpses had been found. More than three years after the tsunami, Ibu Yustia told me how her daughter (a woman in her mid-twenties) did not want to go to the terrace to hang the laundry, because dead bodies had been found there. In chapter three I will write more about the presence of the spirits of the dead. I am not sure whether fear of lingering spirits was part of Ibu Yustia's daughter's reluctance, but at least the memory of the dead bodies ending up in her own house was the reason she did not want to go to the terrace alone.

'I did not have a jilbab': naked bodies and gendered experiences

As mentioned above, Dita described her appearance during the tsunami; not wearing a *jilbab*, running through the streets in her nightgown. This was wrong and against the norms in normal circumstances. Not only would it be against the norms, imagining such an appearance in normal circumstances could define a woman as 'crazy' (*gila*). Ibu Munia, whom I introduced at the beginning of the previous chapter, told me of her appearance on the way to her village, a week after the tsunami: "What people could see was that I did not even have [proper] clothes; we were like crazy people. Our hair was like I don't know what; I did not even have a *jilbab*." Or Ibu Wira, whom I will introduce later in this chapter and who told me what she saw right after the tsunami:

I was already walking in the water when I started to see the corpses in the water. I saw naked people who did not wear clothes and had already become dead bodies (*sudah*

jadi mayat). I also saw people who did not wear clothes on top of the trees, like crazy people.

The sight of many people without clothes was so striking and so 'sad' (*sedih*) that it returned as a crucial element in the descriptions of the immediate post-tsunami situation. A Chinese Indonesian woman, Ibu Lian, told me that this was the image that kept returning in her dreams for some time after the disaster:

I often dreamed of what happened. There were many [people] who were very black (*hitam hitam*), who did not wear a shirt and who did not wear trousers; I saw that from above [from a rooftop]. Everybody was falling (*jatuh jatuh*) and they did not wear a shirt. That is the image I often saw (*sering terbayang di mata*). But now [I do not dream this] anymore.

Some women told me of their own nakedness. Many of them had been wearing the comfortable nightgown or house dress (*duster*) that they would usually wear at home. Often these clothes were ripped off their bodies through the immense force of the water. I was often struck by the attention paid to this experience of being naked, sometimes more than to the experience of being wounded (which most people were after having been in the tsunami water). Many of the women who told me about this, emphasized how others had immediately helped them by giving them a cloth (*kain*) to cover themselves or how they had found such a cloth themselves. The experience of nakedness was gendered, not only because perhaps more women than men were naked (as men were usually wearing trousers), but foremost because the norms for women's coverage are strict. Walking around without a *jilbab* was already out of the ordinary; total nakedness defined the chaos of the event. Although shame may be an important aspect of this experience, when women told me about it I also sensed that their nakedness was one defining aspect of the total chaos and destitution of the disaster; actually setting it beyond the norms of everyday life. Ibu Hasanah, a middle aged woman who lost one of her four children in the disaster, told me the following about the immediate post-tsunami hours:

I was looking for my child. Falling and standing up, falling and standing up (*jatuh bangun jatuh bangun*), how could I walk like that? My feet were sore, but thank God I did not get an infection at the time. Without trousers, my shirt was gone (*baju nggak ada lagi*), staggering from here to there. But I walked on; [everything was] visible (*nampak nampak*), but that was not our problem, right? (...) I did not have a *jilbab*. I did not have anything anymore. I was looking for a shirt, but where would we find a

shirt? There was no place where we could find a shirt that day, right? So I walked like this.

Through her rhetorical questions Ibu Hasanah made clear that on that particular day there was no way in which the proper norms of (women's) appearance could be upheld. It was simply impossible. The norms did matter of course and not being able to hold up to these "embodied moral dispositions" (Zigon 2009a), exposing her body in public, became part of the experience that she narrated to me. Through her questions, however, Ibu Hasanah emphasized that it was not a moral dilemma or a matter of choice and that however painful it was, she was not responsible. Nakedness, loss of dress and improper appearance were then one major, gendered, dimension of the disaster experience; one of the often emphasized experiences that made the disaster 'extraordinary'. Like the descriptions of landscapes of dead bodies, emphasizing the contrasts with 'ordinary' normativity in everyday life, confirms both the current norms and the extraordinariness of the disaster.

'It felt like an illusion': experience, pain, and voice

I heard stories about presumably dead bodies that came to life when they were sprayed clean just before being thrown into a mass grave. Once, a young woman, Rania, told me about a similar experience. In a conversation I had with Rania in early 2008 she told me her story. We were sitting in a house owned by her family in which she and her husband lived temporarily, while waiting for their own tsunami aid house to be finished. She told me how she had been in her house with her only child when the earthquake struck. When the water came, they ran. First with a lot of people, but later she was together only with her mother and child until the water separated them. She saw an enormous wave falling upon her. The next thing she remembered was that she was at the water surface and realized that she had been separated from her family. Then the water was receding and she was pulled back to the sea (*ditarik*), after which the second (and most forceful) wave pushed her back to the village (*didorong*) and up a tree, where she stayed, so severely wounded that she 'did not feel it anymore' (*nggak ada terasa lagi*). She stayed there for hours while the water receded and she realized that she should come down, because the more the water level would fall, the more difficult it would be to descend. She called for help, but at first no one came. She could hardly move: "I had the feeling that I moved, but then I did not" (*perasaan kita bergerak badan, padahal nggak bergerak*). Finally people helped her to get down and she was brought to a refugee site. She went on to tell me:

[There were] corpses. Every day people died. They did not lift me up on the second day. They did it on the third day. Because I was sleeping most of the time. (...) The point is that the people who had died were taken away (*orang yang mayat dibawa semua*). The

living were upstairs where they were cared for. (...) I could hear people but I could not do anything. It felt like... an illusion (*ilusi*).

It was her voice that saved her, when people started to put her body in a body bag.

Suddenly I screamed. So those people were afraid: 'this one is still alive, still alive!' They looked for my family but no one had found me yet. Perhaps they had seen me but had not recognized me, since my face was full of mud and wounds and my body was scratched and full of sores because of the water.

She was brought to a hospital where the doctors said they would have to amputate her legs. She had regained her speech and refused. Some severely wounded people were brought to Jakarta and she demanded that she would be one of them. They brought her to the airport but there the doctors refused to let her go. Her condition was too serious to fly; her blood pressure was too low.

They all refused, there was huge commotion among the men, [but] I was the one who spoke up (*saya sendiri yang omong*): 'God decides when I will die and if I should have died, I would have died yesterday. If that plane does not take me ...' oh I was talking rudely at the time, I was feeling pain, right (*udah sakit sakit ya*) 'if I am not going with that plane then, sorry, but you are not doing your job.'

But then there was one doctor, doctor Sebastian from Malaysia, who said he could handle her low blood pressure and asked her if she was convinced that she was strong enough to go. She answered that she was sure and he signed (*tanda tangan*) for her to go. In the plane she was very afraid, because of the 'trauma' (*masih ketakutan trauma*). The movements felt like the waves of the water. She wanted to leave Aceh.

Rania told me that she stayed in a hospital in Jakarta for two months and she praised the different specialists who helped her to recover fully. She showed me the scars on her body, but her face showed no more scars. She remembers those two months as a very painful time. Apart from the painful recovery there was the other pain, "because I still continuously remembered the trauma" (*tambah penyakit karena kita masih teringat terus trauma ya*). Only when she came back to Aceh after several months she knew her child was gone. From her neighborhood of two thousand residents only two hundred people survived.

Rania's story leads me to think about the experience of pain and suffering and the vital role of expressing experience – in this case narrating it, or putting it into a narrative – in the

‘remaking’ process that I encountered in Banda Aceh. However, before coming back to relations of experience, embodiment, narrative, and temporality, let me first closely read her narrative, as she told it to me three years after the disaster.

I am struck by the way in which Rania describes her experience of being severely wounded in terms of feeling and not feeling, sensing and not sensing. When telling about her experience of being taken away by the water, ending up in a tree and finally in a refugee site where the people did not notice that she was still alive, she does not talk explicitly about pain (*sakit*), a word she uses when explaining her rude talk at the airport later. Of the time that she still could not express herself she talks about having wounds (*luka*), and later of having scratches and sores. She talks of the experience as ‘not feeling anymore’ and having the feeling that she moved her body while in reality she did not. While being in the refugee site, she remembers herself being asleep most of the time, but also noticing the dead bodies around her and hearing people talk and she uses the word *ilusi* to describe her condition. It is a non-reality, or perhaps rather a reality that cannot be narrated. While avoiding the trap of reducing experience to language, it is also important to notice how pain and suffering may show us the limits of articulating experience (Asad 2003, Das 2007, Kleinman et al. 1997, Throop 2010a). What is important then is to expand “our view of experience to include a spectrum of articulations that range from the most formulated and explicit to the most inaccessible and vague.” (Throop 2010a: 3). Therefore it seems that the sudden change in Rania’s narrative at the time she screams and interacts with others again (‘those people were afraid’) is saying much about her experience and the possibilities to articulate experience both before and after that moment. Talal Asad has pointed out how pain itself can be agentive rather than “merely a passive state” (Asad 2003: 79). Pain, he shows, is lived relationally, socially, and is thus not only the private experience of a supposedly integral human body (Asad 2003). This relationality, the ways in which interactions with others shape ways of living sanely through suffering, is clear from Rania’s narrative from the moment in which she screamed.

From narrating this moment onwards she emphasized her agency, her voice in preventing her legs from being amputated and in making sure she would be brought to Jakarta (‘I was the one who spoke up’ – *saya sendiri yang omong*). She regained her subjectivity and could narrate this experience as that of a subject, which was different from the inaccessible and vague experience of being in an *ilusi*. The philosopher Gilles Deleuze has argued for a view of the body not as a thing but as a becoming, looking at processes and relations with the world as well as convergences with other bodies (Deleuze 2005; see also Biehl and Locke 2010, Gibson 2006). In Rania’s story it was the process of her becoming a subject again, effected by her scream through which others recognized her as a living human being, that framed her narrative expression of experience.

On the embodied experience of disease, Byron Good (1994: 116) writes: “For the person who is sick, as for the clinician, the disease is experienced as present in the body. But for the sufferer, the body is not simply a physical object or physiological state but an essential part of the self. The body is subject, the very grounds of subjectivity or experience in the world, and the body as “physical object” cannot be neatly distinguished from “states of consciousness.” Consciousness itself is inseparable from the conscious body.” While the ‘embodiment paradigm’ (Csordas 1990) is now crucial to most theories of experience, it has been especially usefully elaborated in anthropological studies of illness, pain, and suffering (see for example Throop 2010a). When Rania told me how her recovery was especially difficult not only because of her physical wounds but also because of what she calls trauma, which was added to the physical wounds as another disease (*penyakit*), she made clear that in experience this was all integrated – a remark that is revealing for the way in which her body is the ‘ground’ of her subjectivity.

Later in this chapter I will discuss embodied remembering and retelling of tsunami stories. Here, I want to draw attention to the way in which Rania used a particular moral framework in the narration of her experience of suffering. In his study of pain on the Micronesian island of Yap, Jason Throop (2010a) shows how through narratives of their past pain and illness, people transformed their suffering from “mere-suffering” to “suffering-for”, thereby giving meaning and value to their pain. He argues for a temporal approach to experience, which looks at the ways in which people make their pain meaningful in relation to the past and the future. In her story Rania makes her survival through suffering meaningful in a religious moral framework that will be explored in more detail in chapters three and five. Not only her survival itself, but her ‘speaking up’ to make this survival possible she explains through fate, if God would have wanted her to die, she would have died already. What she leaves unspoken, but is implicitly clear, is that this means that apparently God had given her more time to live and therefore she would recover. As we will see in later chapters, the notion of fate is often related to the virtue of acceptance of loss and surrender to God in order to go on with life in the face of grief. Here, Rania also refers to fate as the reason that she is still alive. Interestingly, apart from accepting what happened to her, she also calls upon fate to explain her active struggle to live and to make others accept that she would survive.

Narrative helps to temporally integrate experience (Desjarlais 1994). Rania, telling me her story more than three years after the disaster, narrated her struggle to survive to a past of survival and (therefore) a fated near future of survival. In her narrative she made clear to others that her survival was God’s wish, thereby turning her struggle to survive into a virtue. Her narrative, then, can be seen as both temporally integrating experience and ethically remaking certain “embodied moral dispositions” (Zigon 2009a, see chapter three).

Wounded

Rania was clearly one of the severely wounded. Many survivors were physically wounded, very often because of swallowing the black tsunami water, causing black vomit and diarrhea. Some people remember the black dirt (*kotoran*) coming out of their bodies after they took pills (*capsul*) that they got from (foreign) doctors.⁸⁹ Many told me that they did not know where to go with the wounded, or being wounded themselves, during the first days. Hospitals were full, medical equipment was scarce and hardly working and there was a huge lack of medicines (*obat*). People died during those first days. Others, like Rania, received medical assistance only after a couple days. Rania said that it was possible that her family had seen her but had not recognized her because of the mud and wounds in her face (*Mungkin temukan tapi memang mukanya udah lumpur, luka.*). As I wrote above, many corpses were unrecognizably transformed and as the story of Rania indicates so were some of the wounded survivors.

Ibu Zuhra's story makes this particularly clear. I met Ibu Zuhra, a Gayo woman in her forties, in a relocation neighborhood out of town. Considering the circumstances of most families in this neighborhood (see Samuels 2012) she was relatively well off. For his job as a civil servant, her husband had to travel often and was sometimes away for months, but her three school-going children lived with her and she ran a small kiosk in her house where her neighbors would come to buy cooking oil, detergent and other daily needs. Before the tsunami she lived in a coastal village. When they saw the waves coming, she and her children ran uphill, while their house was totally destroyed. Her husband was in Banda Aceh and the part of her story that I found most striking was the part in which she told me how she searched for him and eventually found him, severely wounded. Her account of his healing process has elements we also saw in Rania's story. While doctors almost gave up on him, she kept caring for him for weeks in a hospital in Medan, continuously pleading for more medical assistance until he finally showed signs of recovery. Here, I will quote in full the passage in which she told me how she found her husband two days after the tsunami, because I think this moving account speaks to the dreadfulness of the bodily transformation of the person one knows best. It is the moment of recognizing and not recognizing that brings to the fore the emotions of remembering the body out-of-place:

On Tuesday I went looking for him in Darussalam. People said he would be there, but nobody knew where. I walked the whole way from village B to Darussalam [ca. 10 kilometers]. I saw many corpses on the way. I was not afraid and there was no smell. I was looking for my husband, right? I entered the [university] campus, which is where I found him. Before you get to the D. building there is an entrance gate. At the end of a

⁸⁹ Often people emphasize that the doctors helping them were foreigners. See chapter one for a discussion on relations with the 'foreign'.

small park, that is where he was. He was sitting like this, next to the entrance gate at the end of the park. He was sitting there. I came from far with a friend and I said to her: 'how sad, the person sitting there.'

At this point in the story Zuhra started to cry. But she went on telling through her tears:

I turned around. His body was black and swollen. I walked over there, from the left to the right. He was in the middle. I asked, 'is this my husband?' I looked for the color of his shirt, but it was not his shirt anymore. He was wearing something that others had given to him. He was like that, like a beggar that sits in *simpang lima* [central roundabout in the city centre]. Then I screamed (*menjerit*). He could still talk. ... sometimes, even though I have many activities, sometimes when I remember this I have to cry. People had given him some four pieces of bread, instant noodles in a black plastic bag and red lemonade (*air sirup merah jambu*). It was red because it came from that kind of bottle. When I remember it..., he was really like a beggar. He could not move anymore. I wanted to lift him up, but I did not succeed. Then I asked some students and we brought him to the soccer field.

She told me about the color of the lemonade and took an effort in describing the exact spot, between the buildings, at the end of the small park. Those are the details of the moment she found him. And she screams. In her narrative, the scream marks the moment she recognizes him; the moment in which the beggar turns out to be her husband. The wounded body becoming someone she cares for. The anthropology of the body is described as focusing "on those moments during which the body and bodiliness are questioned and lose their self-evidence and on the experience or threat of finiteness, limitation, transience, and vulnerability." (Van Wolputte 2004: 263). The (almost) unrecognizably transformed bodies turned these threats into real experiences that, I suggest in this chapter, define the rupture of the disaster; it's disrupting eventness in relation to the prior and later everyday, however changed this later everyday may be through the losses and disruptions. The dead, naked, wounded, and transformed bodies that are so central in the majority of survivor's narratives, not only represent this rupturing experience, but form the core of it. As Joan Scott (1991: 797) wrote on experience, it "is at once always already an interpretation *and* something that needs to be interpreted." Therefore, it is "not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain." The bodies-out-of-place in the tsunami narratives of the survivors can then be seen as a narrative experience, 'already an interpretation' of the narrating survivors – who made and remade, told and retold their narratives over the past few years –, but also as those rupturing effects 'we want to explain.' These narrative experiences are then part of a process to make life liveable; but even if remaking everyday

life in certain ways is necessary to post-disaster recovery, it is new, changed, shot through with loss – as not everything can be remade.

Embodied memory and narrative experience

One of the foci of the ‘memory boom’ in cultural studies and anthropology since the 1980s is the question of how the body remembers (Connerton 1989, Csordas 1990). Studies of embodied memory include questions of *habitus* and cultural production as well as people’s recollections of the past.⁹⁰ Trauma studies have made crucial contributions to our understanding of embodied memory (see Antze and Lambek 1996, Fassin and Rechtman 2009, Kirmayer et al. 2007). In this section I look at the telling of tsunami narratives as embodied action. I will discuss how the body serves as a tool for narrative, as enactment and gesture are as much part of narrative as speech, and how narrative is therefore talk ‘from the body’ itself. Recently, anthropologists have theorized how reflection and embodiment continuously work upon each other (Zigon 2009a). It is also through narrative, then, including particular collective narrative framings, that embodied remembering is created and recreated. Importantly, experience is not only expressed in narrative (Kirmayer 2000), but stories do provide a fundamental way to give meaning to experience (Garro and Mattingly 2000: 10). Later parts of this dissertation will deal with the politics of memory, remembering and space, and the cultural process in which remembering and forgetting become attached to different places, moments, and activities. Here, the focus is predominantly on the embodied telling of tsunami stories.

Above, we have seen how tsunami stories were in crucial ways about bodies, one’s own body as well as the bodies of others. These narratives were not only about bodies but also from bodies; created in intersubjective spheres, sometimes between me and the narrator, sometimes within a group of people. The narratives were not only expressed in language; people showed objects and photographs (see chapter three) and pointed out places, trees, and houses (see chapter four). Embodiment was central to the expression of experience. In language and voice, with people speaking softer or exclaiming, abruptly finishing sentences or going on without interruption, reproducing the sound of the water or the cries for help. It was central because of the enactment of the narrative, through gestures and facial expressions. Many people reflected on what the telling of the story did to them, to their embodied selves – how they got goose bumps or felt unstable when telling the story, how

⁹⁰ Anthropological studies of memory have been criticized for using the concept so broadly that it starts to replace ‘culture’ (Berliner 2005). When used in that broad sense we can indeed say that memory is necessary to live culturally. The concept then loses its specificity and becomes less useful (*ibid.*). In this dissertation I will rather focus on the process of remembering and forgetting as a crucial component of individual and social ‘remaking’ after the tsunami. This means paying attention to particular ways of remembering and forgetting the disaster and how these come about in a particular cultural context. In chapter four I will discuss the concept of ‘collective memory’.

they had to stop talking or how their voice trembled because they felt like crying. The tsunami left its traces on the body in scars, disabilities, chronic illnesses, skin problems. Several women, for example, asked me for remedies for the spots in their faces that kept returning since they had been in the tsunami water.

During interviews as well as informal conversations, many people, men as well as women, showed me the scars on their legs and arms. They often did so in the middle of their stories, to show where and how they had been wounded, but sometimes also as an introduction to their stories. The scars were regularly referred to as *bukti*, proof; proof of having been in the tsunami water. Although this use of the word could be understood in the politicized context of having the status of tsunami victim (*korban tsunami*) or not, I believe it can also be interpreted in the context of embodied memories – the scar as evoking, representing, making visible, as well as in itself being, something that people would carry with them forever. The *bukti* is the embodied past in the present, continuing into the future. As we will see in chapter four, the tsunami monuments, especially *PLTD Apung* – the ship that ended up in the middle of the city –, are also talked about as *bukti*; not so much to convince others that the tsunami has taken place, but rather in a similar temporal notion of proof – as something that will remain visibly present in the future. Ibu Safrina, a woman in her early thirties, told me how her husband lost his front teeth during the tsunami, but up till now he refused to get implants, arguing that he would keep the open spot in his mouth as a *kenang-kenangan* – a term often used for objects that are considered keepsakes.

Safrina told me about her husband's teeth and showed me the scars on her own legs. Then she told me her story, speaking rapidly and paying attention to every detail. She told me how she saw and heard the water coming, how she saw her grandmother's house being swept away with the sound of an explosion, the water reaching her two year old daughter and her only seconds later. Then she stopped, "my child... I don't know, Anne, when I tell about that day I have to cry, when I tell about it I have to cry again." Through her tears she went on to tell how 'mama' was the last word she heard her child say before they were separated (*lepas*). Safrina ended up inside a house where it was completely dark. While narrating, she mimicked the gasping she heard and through which she knew there was another person. Then she enacted how they found their way up to the roof, from where she saw the destruction. She told me several times how sure she had been that she was a widow now (i.e. that her husband was dead). She went on to describe the situation on the rooftop. How they were standing there in the heat of the burning sun and how she found a clean cloth to cover herself. In her story she paid attention to the details of both her actions and feelings before she was reunited with her husband:

I stood there and I saw a towel, which I tied [around my leg], my foot did not hurt yet. It hurt within, the inside was sad (*Dalam ini sakit, dalamnya sedih itu kan*). I stood and called my mother, I called my father, I called but they were not there. I had a stepmother in K [another village] and I did not know her condition. I called my sister, I called all my brothers and sisters. Apparently my husband heard my voice. He appeared on top of another house... there he appeared! He knew it was me – this is him telling, right – this means that Safrina is already safe.

By summing up to whom she called out without getting a reply – in retrospect the people she lost –, Safrina emphasized both the loneliness and sadness (hurting from within) on the rooftop and the relief of her husband hearing her and of her seeing him. In her narrative she elaborated extensively on this particular moment, while continuously switching between her own and her husband's perspective.

Apparently he thought... that I did not survive, yet I also thought that [he did not survive]. [I thought that] I was a widow already. Not saved, let alone the child. [But] he thought again, perhaps Safrina is saved because she is a very firm person; I am firm. I want to do everything by myself, not asking for the help of others. So then he thought, Safrina is a firm person. Surely, she can save herself.

While continuously alternating the perspectives and telling something about herself through his voice, she moved to the moment that they came together and she asked him what to do now. He told her they should do *zikir* (practicing mindfulness of God): “We immediately sat down to do *zikir*.”

Like many other people I interviewed, Safrina told her story not only with her voice but also with the rest of her body, enacting certain passages with gestures, imitating sounds she had heard, and pointing out the exact places on her body where she was hurt and where she tied the towel. Often people would enact how they were hit by the water, but also how they did things in the following hours and days. One grandmother for example showed me exactly how she tried to feed her baby grandchild while staying on a rooftop and meanwhile seeing dead bodies floating in the water. While alternating her narrative from helping the baby to what she saw, she enacted the exact four times that she gave the baby water from the cap of a bottle.

The whole body is involved in the act of narration. At one point the ‘narrative I’ of Safrina interrupted her ‘narrated I’ to point out what telling the story did to her (‘when I tell about it, I have to cry again’). Especially women would tell me when they felt like crying and, very often, they would show me how they got goose bumps when remembering or telling something – something only some men did while telling their stories. However, also

without this reflection the embodied and intersubjective actions and reactions of course informed the expression of experience – a gendered and intersubjective relation between narrative and silence that I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

Missing bodies

Safrina and her husband were so severely hurt that they had to recover in hospitals outside Banda Aceh for several weeks. They did not have the chance to search for their daughter and they never found her. Others told me how they searched for days and days, neglecting their own physical condition of hunger and thirst, wounds, and dress. Sometimes they did find one or more corpses of family members, but often they did not. One of the people who told me elaborately about this searching process was Ibu Elli.

When I met Elli in early 2009, she was living with her husband, four children and an orphaned nephew in a severely hit neighborhood of Banda Aceh. Elli had married her husband when she was 15 years old. She was in her early thirties now and her two eldest children already attended junior high school. The seven of them lived in a tsunami aid house with two small bedrooms and a living room. The living room was divided in two parts by a big wooden closet. The television was in the back, while the chairs made the front into a living room, where guests could be welcomed (*ruang tamu*) (see chapter one). The bathroom was outside, to the back of the house, where the family had made a kitchen with sheets of corrugated iron. The family income was highly irregular and Elli and her husband often had the greatest difficulties to provide for the clothes and school fees of their four children. Elli's husband worked in the nearby fish port, not earning anything when there was little fish to trade or when bad weather prevented the boats from going to sea. Elli herself irregularly earned money, for example by buying and selling clothes. Later she opened a small kiosk in front of her house.

The neighborhood they lived in was her neighborhood of birth, in which the family had lived for many generations. It was almost completely destroyed during the tsunami. While Elli herself was out of town that day, her husband and children managed to save themselves by driving away on a motorcycle immediately when people called out that the water was rising. Elli's parents, however, did not get away so quickly; their bodies were never found. Elli lost her parents, a sister and many extended family members, neighbors, and friends. On the first day of the tsunami, she was reunited with her husband and children. They stayed in a temporary refugee site and the next day she went back to her neighborhood:

I brought my children to a family member in village L. and then I went back. To my *kampung*. I wanted to see the dead bodies; to see my mother's body. Nobody went back, it was only us who returned. Most people did not dare to come back. We went back [to the neighborhood] and there were no people; there were dead bodies; dead bodies

everywhere. There were so many dead bodies. Some had been brought together in a house. There were dead bodies on the roads, dead bodies on the rooftops. There were so many dead bodies.

She looked at the bodies, tried to find her parents, aunts, and uncles. Finally, they only found one younger cousin. She saw so many bodies, she said, that she was not afraid of them anymore. She searched in other neighborhoods and in the mosques. She went back day after day. On the seventh day people started to warn her that the bodies could spread diseases; that they would swell and burst and rot. But, Elli said, they did not. Rather, many of the bodies dried because of the sun. They did not rot on the seventh day, not on the fourteenth day, not even after a month – when she kept on looking at the bodies everywhere she went, but she never found her parents.

Many people told me how after several days they were prevented from searching the dead bodies by authorities who said that the bodies could spread diseases. As has been argued rather strongly by now, the idea that after a disaster dead bodies have to be buried as soon as possible out of fear of diseases is a pervasive myth. Dead bodies rarely spread diseases (PAHO 2004).⁹¹ After the tsunami, the myth strongly influenced the actions of the governments of the affected states that quickly started with mass burials in mass graves (for Sri Lanka see Sumathipala et al. 2006). The shocking images of the trucks lifting heaps of corpses and throwing them in mass graves went all over the world and were strongly remembered in Aceh. Psychologists have pointed at the enormous importance of identification and proper burial for social and psychological mourning and recovery processes. The uncertainty of never having identified the bodies of loved ones can have a huge negative impact on the process of grieving (PAHO 2004, Sumathipala et al. 2006). After the tsunami, however, governments, media, and other agencies helped to spread the myth that the dead should be buried quickly because they could spread diseases (Telford et al. 2006: 53). Of course, apart from the myth of spreading diseases, there may be logistical reasons for mass burials after such a big disaster (Sumathipala et al. 2006). Yet, more time could have led to the identification of more dead bodies.

Although many people in Aceh told me that the dead bodies indeed did not seem to be rotting (or spreading diseases), nobody ever openly questioned the need for mass graves. While I expected that the fact that the bodies had not been buried in an Islamic way would be highly problematic for people in Aceh, most people were not so worried about this. They would rather say that the rules did not apply in this case because it was a case of *darurat* (state of necessity)⁹², a case in which God would also make an exception. Moreover,

⁹¹ See also the WHO webpage on myths and realities in disaster situations:

<http://www.who.int/hac/techguidance/ems/myths/en/> (last accessed, 31 May 2012).

⁹² According to Islamic doctrine, this means that in a 'state of necessity' it is legitimate to act in opposition with the law (Linant de Bellefonds 2012).

the mass burials were a direct consequence of the tsunami that had been given by God and were therefore in a way also seen as part of God's plan. The (apparent) inevitability of the mass graves in this very out-of-the-ordinary situation was thus part of this broad acceptance. From several people with other religions (Christian or Buddhist) who lost family members that were probably buried in mass graves, I got the same response – that this was acceptable because of the emergency. This all did not deny the horror of having seen dead bodies disposed of like that. And sometimes the boundaries of the 'acceptable' were indeed crossed. One morning I visited a large mass grave in the district of Aceh Besar with my friend and key informant Cut Marliani. As we stood there she told me how she had seen that the bodies of a (probably unrelated) man and woman were put together in one body bag. "Excuse me sir," she told the Red Cross volunteer handling the bodies, "but we really cannot do this in Aceh."

Although the mass graves were accepted as necessary because of the emergency situation, not having identified one's family members was generally mentioned as one of the most difficult things to deal with. Elli, who never found the bodies of her parents, explained that for her this was very hard to accept:

Why do I think of them so often? Because they died, [but] I can accept (*saya rela*) that they are dead. But I am not satisfied (*tidak puas*) with not knowing where their bodies are. If only their bodies would be there, there would be graves (*seandainya mayatnya ada kuburannya ada*). Then perhaps I would be satisfied. If there would be something, if I would be sad, I could go and see their graves, but now I do not know. That is why I am sad (*Itu saya sedih*).

Not knowing what happened to the bodies of her parents was the thing that made grieving most difficult for Elli. She told me that she had visited mass graves, but that she was never convinced that her parents were there. Other people were convinced that their family members would be in a certain mass grave because of the direction of the water. Although the water sometimes came from different directions at once, many people could tell me precisely where the dead bodies that ended up in their neighborhood had come from and where the bodies from their own neighborhood had ended up. Some people therefore concluded that their family members would be in a certain mass grave. Others told me they had just chosen one of the big mass graves as a place to pray and to visit on Islamic holidays. Many people argued that according to their religion it was not necessary to pray at the exact spot where the bodies had been buried (see chapter three).

Yet, in post-tsunami Aceh, non-identification – not having found the dead bodies of loved ones – led to enormous uncertainty, especially when the missing were children. People kept searching for their children in refugee camps for months and months after the

disaster and kept hoping or fearing that they would be still alive in the following years. The following section will look at what rumors of child trafficking did in this climate of uncertainty.

Rumors of child trafficking

Hilang: gone, disappeared, lost, dead. A word that was so often used in conversations about the tsunami. People used it when describing the memory that would never go away (*tidak pernah hilang*), but perhaps it figured most often in phrases concerning missing people. Rather than using the straightforward *meninggal* (to die/died), most people would refer to the people lost in the tsunami as *hilang*. Their bodies were never identified; they were gone, disappeared, *hilang*. Two months after I started my fieldwork I asked one of my interlocutors, Pak Hamdani, why people used *hilang* rather than *meninggal*. He answered that it was because actually many people *did* disappear but did not die. They had been taken out of Aceh. I asked whether he thought this truly happened and after confirming that it did happen he told me the story of a student who had found refuge near the airport and who was stunned and taken away to Medan never to be heard from again. Bystanders later confirmed that they had seen how he was carried into the plane as an unconscious and ‘severely wounded’ person. His parents searched for him in Medan, but he was never found. However, Pak Hamdani added, there were also people who sincerely intended to take care of orphans. Another couple he knew well found their son in an orphanage in Medan. The caretakers in Medan had genuinely thought that the boy did not have parents anymore.

One afternoon, a couple of weeks earlier in my fieldwork, I had an interview with Ibu Wira, one of my neighbors who lost her young daughter in the disaster. The body was never found. We talked for a long time about her grieving process, about her way of dealing with and coming to accept the death of her daughter (see chapter three). Suddenly, I heard the *azan*, the call for the evening prayer (*maghrib*). Realizing that I should have been home already I thanked her and she let me out. However, on the doorstep she stopped me, asking if I had ever heard of Acehnese children coming to the Netherlands after the tsunami. I replied that I had not and she sighed, saying that she already thought so but that she would be happy if I could let her know if I would ever hear anything like that. I said I would. Later I realized that it was still possible for her that her daughter would be alive, somewhere.

More than three years after the tsunami I met and heard of quite some parents who believed or knew⁹³ that their children were alive somewhere. Some others suggested the

⁹³ Byron Good (1994) examines the juxtaposition of ‘knowing’ and ‘believing’ in post-enlightenment modernity in general and anthropology in particular. In this case the juxtaposition would, from a rationalist epistemological perspective, mean that people could only ‘know’ that their child was still alive if they had

possibility; hoping or fearing. Such seemed to be the case for Ibu Wira. The way she suggested both possible realities to me, makes me think of what Byron Good (1994: 153-158) describes as the “subjunctivizing elements” in narratives, elaborating Jerome Bruner’s work on subjunctivity and referring to the narrative rendering of reality’s open-endedness. The illness narratives analyzed by Good contain different possible beginnings of the illness and thereby leave open different possibilities for healing, with “subjunctivity” structuring a narrative’s open-endedness and alternative perspectives. Ibu Wira’s narrative also contains different perspectives, different possible realities, narrated in different contexts – the one in the setting of an interview, the other informally on the doorstep. As in the subjunctivizing parts of illness narratives studied by Good, coexisting realities of children being dead or alive in the years after the tsunami left open uncertain, hopeful, and frightening futures. The articulation of these simultaneous possibilities moreover speaks to the difficulty of putting a more or less coherent narrative together while at the same time retaining multiple perspectives and alternatives in an open-ended reality.

Child trafficking

For the people I spoke with in Aceh, some of whom I will quote and refer to below, the few confirmed (i.e. ‘written’) cases of post-tsunami child trafficking are one source that seems to give credit to the possible truth of the rumors and thus to the possibility that there are still many children living outside Aceh. Strangely, however, in the scarce media and NGO reports these few confirmed cases are usually treated as exceptions; cases that are dealt with separately. There is no suggestion of them being part of a larger phenomenon. Before outlining my approach to analyze the rumors of child trafficking and then elaborating on some of the stories themselves, let me first look into the few things that have been written about it. Towards the end of this chapter, I will pay attention to the lack of mobilization, or even the immobilization that the narratives of child trafficking seem to effect. It is important to realize that child trafficking rumors and stories often come up in post-disaster situations; for example in Pakistan after the earthquake in 2005 and in Haiti after the earthquake in 2010 (Montgomery 2011). These rumors appear to have become part of a common post-disaster narrative in which traffickers take advantage of vulnerably disaster victims (*ibid.*).⁹⁴ In the rest of this chapter I explore what these rumors did in the specific context of Aceh and how the situation of uncertainty and the particular post-tsunami and post-conflict situation informed the rumors and their affects and effects.

empirical, controllable evidence. However, some parents told me that they simply knew (*tahu*) their child was still alive, sometimes adding *dalam hati* (in the heart, litt. liver).

⁹⁴ Apart from the post-disaster situation, the fears of child trafficking in Aceh could possibly also be seen in relation to the very real transfers of children out of East Timor during the occupation by Indonesia (see Van Klinken 2012). Below I will elaborate on the metaphoric element of the rumor that speaks to the fear of outsiders (in this case the Indonesian state) taking away the ‘future’ of Aceh.

In the first weeks after the tsunami rumors about child trafficking started to circulate in national and international media.⁹⁵ In the first week of January, the Indonesian government prohibited the adoption of homeless Acehnese children, as a response to the rumors.⁹⁶ On the 13th of January the Washington Post published an article on a Christian organization that wanted to adopt 300 Acehnese children to raise them in Christian homes.⁹⁷ Although it quickly became clear that the organization had only circulated this idea through an email and was nothing near taking the children out of the province,⁹⁸ the message sparked rumors of Christian proselytizing as well as child trafficking. However, to officials and international organizations the issue of child trafficking soon faded to the background and later the usual statement was that the rumors had been largely ‘unsubstantiated’ (IDLO 2007). In a report on ‘Children and the Tsunami’ one year after the disaster, UNICEF concludes that “[t]here are no substantiated cases of trafficking of tsunami-affected children.” (UNICEF 2005). However, also in December 2005, the Center for Child Protection and Study (PKPA) reported several cases of post-tsunami child trafficking and illegal adoption.⁹⁹ Three years later, in a 2008 newspaper advertisement that was part of an awareness campaign, the IDLO (International Development Law Organization) itself refers to a story of an eight year old boy who lost his family in the tsunami, was brought to Medan and ended up in child labor – from which he managed to escape (IDLO 2008). This case is, according to the IDLO, “a harsh reminder that underage orphaned children should be on-guard if they are promised decent jobs outside of Aceh on the pretext of helping them.” (*ibid.*). The child’s story is placed in a context of general trafficking without opening up the possibility that the post-tsunami rumors were not always ‘unsubstantiated’.

The December 2007 – January 2008 edition of Aceh Magazine published a short message about the government being busy taking care of 203 children who had been brought to orphanages and Islamic boarding schools out of Aceh after the tsunami and still had not been reunited with their families.¹⁰⁰ The authorities were busy arranging their home coming but one problem was that children were now going to school in their new homes. In the article the head of the provincial department of social services is quoted saying that there are no cases of children changing their religion. The article makes no mention of how and why these children were taken away. It emphasizes that the cases of

⁹⁵ See for example: ‘Traffickers prey on Aceh’s orphans.’ *The Jakarta Post*, 4 January 2005; ‘Traffickers threaten Aceh orphans.’ www.cnn.com, published 10 January 2005.

⁹⁶ ‘Govt bans adoption to protect orphans.’ *The Jakarta Post*, 5 January 2005.

⁹⁷ ‘Group says it relocated 300 orphans.’ *The Washington Post*, 13 January 2005.

⁹⁸ ‘Christian group never had custody of orphans.’ *Washington Post*, 15 January 2005.

⁹⁹ ‘Ada indikasi perdagangan anak korban tsunami.’ *tempointeraktif.com*, 16 December 2005; ‘Child trafficking still going strong in Aceh, Nias.’ *The Jakarta Post*, 19 December 2005.

¹⁰⁰ ‘203 anak korban tsunami masih di luar Aceh.’ *Aceh Magazine*, December 2007– January 2008.

these children are all clear now; they are in recognized institutions, their parents have been informed, and the state is taking care of them.

It seems that the only cases that are written about are those that are 'clear' now. But there are less clear cases as well. The staff of the Irish Red Cross, handling questions and complaints of 'beneficiaries' about the reconstruction process, told me in 2008 about their problems handling one case in which it was clear that a child had been trafficked out of Aceh. The trafficker had been caught but it was totally unclear where the child had gone. Sometimes, however, such children were identified in extraordinary ways. In one such case a woman recognized her son on national television; a story that I will relate later in this chapter. In October 2009 both the English language newspaper *Jakarta Post* and the national newspaper *Tempo* ran a series of articles about another very sad case: a ten year old boy in Jakarta was suspected of murdering his foster mother. It turned out that the boy was a tsunami victim from the North Sumatran island of Nias who was perhaps mistreated by his foster mother.¹⁰¹ Later, *Tempo* reported that the boy had possibly been abducted after the tsunami.¹⁰² His biological mother was still alive and said she did not know that he was in Jakarta. At the end of that month the boy was reunited with his biological mother.¹⁰³ Finally, in December 2011, seven years after the tsunami, Meri returned to her village in West Aceh.¹⁰⁴ The sixteen year old girl had been nine at the time of the tsunami. After the disaster, she was picked up by a woman who made her beg on the streets in Banda Aceh for seven years. Only then did Meri dare to escape, taking the bus to the town of which she had only a very vague idea that that was where she came from, where she was finally reunited with her parents.

The cases in which children were indeed found back in foster homes and Islamic boarding schools outside Aceh, or in forced labor as in the story of the eight year old boy above, suggest that there is good reason to question the idea that the rumors were totally unsubstantiated. However, it remains unclear to what extent children have been trafficked out of Aceh. Therefore the rumors remain rumors; vague and uncertain.

Rumor

I approach the stories – and remarks, doubting questions, sub sentences – about post-tsunami child trafficking that I heard in Aceh, as rumors. Before looking closer at these rumors, I will point out why I treat them as rumor and I will argue that to take rumor seriously we should not start from questions of truth and, more importantly, therefore not treat them as metaphor for something else or as comments on a social situation.

¹⁰¹ See for example: 'Pelaku pembunuhan ibu angkat, korban tsunami Aceh-Nias' *tempointeraktif.com*, 16 October 2009; 'The boy who allegedly killed his step-mother apologizes' *The Jakarta Post*, 16 October 2009.

¹⁰² 'Bocah pembunuh ibu tiri, diduga diculik dari ibu kandungnya' *tempointeraktif.com*, 29 October 2009.

¹⁰³ 'Boy murder suspect reunites with biological mother' *The Jakarta Post*, 30 October 2009.

¹⁰⁴ 'Hilang sejak tsunami, Meri kembali ke rumah.' *Serambi Indonesia*, 23 December 2011.

Rumors may be true and they may be false. Uncertainty is one of their defining characteristics, as “the definition of rumor is agnostic as to accuracy.” (Fine 2007: 6). In her historical account of vampire stories in colonial Africa, Luise White is a bit more ambiguous. She repeatedly emphasizes that she is not interested in the question of historical truth; what matters is the social truth of the rumors. What is important to her is rather that “people do not speak with truth, with a concept of the accurate description of what they saw, to say what they mean, but they construct and repeat stories that carry the values and meanings that most forcibly get their points across.” (2000: 30). She mentions that treating the rumors as ‘metaphorical’ would be a polite way of saying they are false and “may eclipse all the intricate ways in which people use social truths to talk about the past.” (2000: 42). Yet, treating the rumors as metaphors is exactly the approach she takes: “I think bloodsucking by public employees is a fairly obvious metaphor for state-sponsored extractions, just as vampires are an unusually convincing modern metaphor for psychic ills and personal evil” (*op. cit.*: 18). And, although she may not be interested in the question whether the people narrating these stories believed them or not, to analyze them as metaphors, looking at what they reveal, she herself has to start from the position that they are false (*op. cit.*: 42): “Vampire stories are, then, confusions and misunderstanding of the best kind: they reveal the world of power and uncertainty in which Africans have lived in this century. Their very falseness is what gives them meaning; they are a way of talking that encourages a reassessment of everyday experience to address the workings of power and knowledge and how regimes use them.”

It is at this point that my approach to rumor diverges from the one taken by White. Although below I will look at certain elements of the child trafficking rumor that become particularly forceful in a certain socio-historical context, I am not treating the child trafficking rumors as such as a metaphor for something else. By not treating the rumors as metaphor, by taking the stories literally, and asking what the possibility of these stories being true (or false) does in the post-tsunami society, I am deliberately taking the stance that they indeed could be true – again, not knowing to what extent they are is what gives them the character of rumor, not only for people in Aceh but also for me. This brings me to an important issue: the researcher herself (or himself) is always implicated in the rumor that people tell her, simply because of the epistemological implications of doing research. Western scientific research based on rationality, on a separation between knowledge and belief, true and false, requires positioning oneself in relation to ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’. I am implicated in these stories in other ways which I will discuss below. The ethical predicament of the rational epistemology becomes very explicit when studying rumor. Let me put it like this: I am as uncertain as many Acehnese about the extent to which the rumors are true. But what if I would not be? What if I thought I knew, or believed, something else (whether it would be true or false)? Would that matter for taking these

rumors seriously as an object of anthropological analysis? Yes, if that would mean that I would treat the rumors, as White ultimately does, as false consciousness, as a metaphoric way of talking about something else. No, if I would stick to analyzing what these rumors mean and do in post-tsunami Aceh; in what contexts they were discussed and how I was intersubjectively involved in these moments. The latter approach is therefore the one I will take in the rest of this section. For White, the vampire stories are ways of ‘getting a point across’. She questions the importance of the question of truth, not only for the historian, but also for the people circulating the stories. This is different in Aceh. Although I analyze the rumors in the way I outlined above, this does not mean that on a different level of inquiry it does not matter whether the stories about child trafficking are true or false. It matters to the parents who lost their children in Aceh and it also matters to me. However, it will not be the line of inquiry taken in this section that will rather be concerned with the social truth, the effects and affects of these rumors.

In the analysis of these rumors, I will be particularly interested in the personal experience they become part of. Above, I pointed at the subjunctivity of this experience. The region of rumor (Das 2007) illuminates how experience is personal and social. White’s approach is instructive here, as she points out how rumor comes in when experience is especially confusing. Furthermore, “[i]t is only when these new words are taken up and transformed into personal narratives – when circulating stories are refashioned into personal experiences and the knowledge such experiences contain – that people participate in shaping the language with which they describe the world.” (White 2000: 35). The act of narration is crucial here, because “rumor occupies a region of language with the potential to make us experience events, not simply by pointing to them as to something external, but rather by producing them in the very act of telling.” (Das 2007: 108). This is then another way in which the researcher is always implicated: by being there and being told these stories, I effectively contributed to their existence (but, importantly again, not to their truth).

Below, I will show how certain elements of the child trafficking rumors crucially pointed to the “climate” in which these rumors started to circulate. As Spyer (2006b: 194) points out, this “climate” is fundamentally different from a mere “backdrop”. Rather than arising against a certain socio-historical backdrop, the rumors I am discussing here emerged in the post-tsunami “climate” of uncertainty and confusion, political change, imaginations and aspirations, possibilities and anxieties. In turn, they also contributed to the very infrastructure of this climate. It is in this way that the elements through which the rumor is narrated (again, not the rumors as such) do reveal something about the anxieties of a certain situation. In analyzing rumors, Veena Das (2007: 134) asserts that “the virtual is always more encompassing than the actual” and it is in that messy space between virtual and actual that certain elements become part of rumors, making truth and falsity perpetual

uncertainties. What I will elaborate on in the rest of this section is what the circulating stories of Acehese children being taken away did in post-tsunami Aceh in the way of creating one possible, unfinished reality. One of uncertain absence, of *hilang*.

Uncertainty

Some people told me they had seen trucks full of children driving away to Medan. One of my host family members told me about an eleven year old boy who was taken away to another part of the province by people who thought he did not have any family left. His family found out where he was but the family that adopted him would not give him back. It took a long process and the intervention of an international NGO to return him to his family. In an informal conversation we had in front of his kiosk Pak Syarifuddin, a middle aged man who lost his wife and two daughters in the tsunami (see chapter three), told me that he had heard that many children had been trafficked and were living outside Aceh. I asked him whether he thought this really happened and he said he did not know. However, of one family he knew that only two children, six and twelve years old, survived. The twelve year old child was taken to the airport by some strangers. There a family member recognized the child and prevented the strangers from taking her with them. Often, uncertainty was fed by a neighbor recalling having seen the child after the tsunami, giving hope to some but outright fear to others, as in the case of Ibu Asmara, who still had sleepless nights imagining that her daughter had been taken away by ill meaning people: “I think, if she already returned to Allah, well that’s where all of us are going later, right? But sometimes I think, she could have been taken away by people, she is tortured by people; that is what we remember!”

She went on to explain that she wished she would have found the body. That would put her at rest. However, she had heard that many children had been taken away. When I asked where they were taken, Ibu Asmara and her neighbor explained that children were taken to Medan and Jakarta and even that they had been turned into Buddhists. Ibu Asmara herself had heard from others that they had seen her daughter with a friend right after the disaster. She looked for her for months in Aceh and even in Medan, but never found her. I asked her how she handled the uncertainty and she answered that she could only pray: “I pray that we [my daughter and I] can meet for one minute, I don’t know what else I can say; all my words are gone. Allah, please give her back, Allah, please bring her home. That is the way I pray.” Similarly, in January 2012 I asked a friend, Fatma, who lost her young daughter in the tsunami, what she thought of the story of Meri who had returned home after seven years (see above). She answered:

Meri was treated very badly. I think of my own child (*teringat anak sendiri*). We never found the body. I don’t know if she is still alive and where she is. How could I search

for her now? I don't know. She was three during the tsunami, she would be ten years old now. I just pray. When you pray for your parents or children the prayer reaches them quickly.

I asked her whether praying made her feel better and she answered that she was at least more at ease (*lebih tenang*).

When I asked my friend and interlocutor Cut Marliani about child trafficking, she told me several stories. One concerned her own niece. A friend had seen her sitting on a bridge on the day after the tsunami. The friend saw how a car stopped next to her and how she stepped into the car. She was never seen again, but 'in her heart' (*dalam hati kecil*) Cut Marliani knew that her niece was still living somewhere. She also told me the story of an undercover agent who went to a brothel in Medan and found a girl who had been taken there after the tsunami. He could not save her and bring her home. And the story of an acquaintance who found his son in a compound in Medan, guarded by the military (*brimob*). He managed to take the child away, without the guards knowing it, but was chased later on. When people went to look at that compound later, it was deserted. In yet another story, someone recognized his child on television in a program showing an orphanage in Malaysia. It turned out to be truly his son and they spoke on the phone, but it was impossible to get him back.

These stories she told me with confidence. She had heard them mostly from the people figuring in them; she thought them to be true, at least quite probably so. Here, I should mention that I think it *does* matter whether people think the rumors or stories are true. I noticed a change when she started to talk about something of which she did *not* know whether it truly happened or not. She rather approached the story itself as a rumor, lowering her voice and starting with the words 'there are also people who say that people saw...' (*Ada juga yang orang bilang orang lihat kan*), directly adding 'I do not know whether this information is true or not' and later repeating several times that this was all 'according to that information' (*menurut informasi itu*). It is the story of an American ship coming right after the tsunami to help. She said that people say that children who entered the ship never returned. She connected this rumor to another one that I heard several times; that the tsunami could have been caused by a bomb, perhaps a nuclear bomb that was brought to explosion by the Americans. This would explain why the American ship arrived in Aceh so quickly. It is interesting that she differentiated between the stories in matters of certainty. What is more important however, is that the stories, whether thought of as true or not, enabled the possibility of surviving tsunami children still living somewhere outside of Aceh. As rumors then, these stories make possible other possible stories. After telling all the stories Cut Marliani then concluded that she was sure (*yakin*) that there are many children outside Aceh. There is one more reason for her that made this

so probable, one that is crucial for this chapter and that she repeated several times during our conversations: the apparent lack of children's corpses. So many children disappeared but only a few corpses were found.

I deliberately asked Cut Marliani about these stories, because I knew she knew many of them. But from most people, I heard about the child trafficking possibility outside any interview context, sometimes perhaps deliberately outside this 'formal' context as with Ibu Wira. For some, like Ibu Asmara, it was a worry they shared quickly. I once even had a long conversation with a woman who still went regularly to Medan to visit foster homes and look for her daughter, three years after the disaster, something she was quick to tell everybody. More often however, the possibility of one's child still being alive was more covert, unspoken of and if spoken of than only 'on the doorstep' or about someone else. For example, one woman I often met never told me she thought her daughter might still be alive. It was only in a conversation about child trafficking that I had with someone else that this third person said, "the child probably died in the waves but she still thinks her daughter might be alive." In her discussion on rumor Veena Das writes that she has come to think of the social in terms of "unfinished stories" (Das 2007). The daughter might still be alive. And then the unspoken question, 'how can we ever know?' Unfinished stories become part of the everyday, but can also be immobilizing. If there is no way to know, what can one do? Stories can make possible other stories, but stories can also stop. At the end of this section I will return to this effect of immobilization. First, however, I will relate two stories of women who did find 'knowledge' and I will analyze certain elements from the child trafficking rumors that seem to be particularly embedded in the post-tsunami and post-conflict climate.

I met Ibu Nuraini at a wedding party. Others had told her I would be there and she had wanted to meet me; to tell me this story. She told me how she lost her daughter and her niece (her sister's daughter) in the tsunami. After years of searching for her daughter she decided to try to find out in another way what had happened to her and therefore she had consulted 'someone with knowledge' (*orang punya ilmu, orang pintar*) just a couple of months before we met. This man told her that her daughter (of whom she had never found the body) was buried near the mosque of one of Banda Aceh's neighborhoods. The child had worn a specific valuable necklace and the wife of the village head who buried her had sold the necklace and donated the money to the mosque. Nuraini went to this neighborhood and the story of the man of knowledge turned out to be true: she found the woman who remembered the necklace and the burial of the dead girl's body. The story of her own daughter turned out to be the introduction of the story she really wanted to tell me. Because after finding out about her daughter, she asked the man about her lost niece. This girl had never been found either. He told her the niece had been taken away by

missionaries and lived in Brazil now. He could tell her the address in Brazil and told Nuraini and her sister that the child was raised now as a Christian in a Christian orphanage (which, she explained to me, was similar to the Islamic *pesantren*). She had received a new name, Margareth, was a healthy eleven year old girl and was treated well. The woman who introduced me to her later told me that Nuraini thought that her niece planned to return to Aceh as a missionary one day. Another woman joined our conversation and asked how they were sure that she was in Brazil; did they ever try to make a phone call to that address? Nuraini said that she and her sister did not, but that there was a *hubungan hati* (connection of the heart, litt.: liver). I asked her then how this man could possibly know this and she answered that she had been very surprised about this as well. Probably, she said, this was because of his *ilmu* (knowledge). Although she told me the story in a very convincing way, the reason she told me this was quite the opposite. She asked me whether it was true or not that children had been taken abroad. And had some of them been taken to Brazil? Could I find out? I replied that I honestly did not know and could not find out the truth about it; that the only thing I, as a researcher, could do was write about her story – which she agreed to.

Below I will discuss three elements of the child trafficking rumors that keep returning, if not in all, than at least in many of the stories: the idea that *children* were taken away; that they had been taken away by outsiders (*orang luar*) out of Aceh (*luar Aceh*); and the element of conversion. These elements are all very clear in Ibu Nuraini's story. When I asked Ibu Nuraini how she felt now knowing where her daughter was buried, she answered that she was sad. She was just sad, she told me, as the memories now kept returning to her. In the story about her niece however, there was hope. After all, the man of knowledge had been right about her daughter, something he could not have known in a regular way, so the story about her niece could also be true. Interestingly, even though the girl was Christianized, which would be a very bad thing in Aceh, Nuraini's emphasis seemed to be on the positive sides of the story: that 'Margareth' was treated well and received a good education. Her story was rather one of hope.

The following story highlights another element that returned in some stories I heard: even if children had been recognized and were living now outside of Aceh it seemed to be impossible for them to return.

I met Ibu Irma in 2009 in the relocation neighborhood where I did part of my research and where she lived together with her husband and children. She lost one of her sons, six years old at the time, during the tsunami. She had looked for him but finally accepted that he was dead. On a usual afternoon in 2008 she was watching a singing contest for children on national television when she recognized her son, then nine years old:

He was joining the singing contest (*idola cilik*); I thought, that child looks a lot like my child, but my child was hit by the tsunami, he doesn't live anymore. But my heart spoke: 'there is no child like your child, that is your child', my heart said. I just watched and called my husband, 'look at the TV, this boy looks like our child!' He was praying but after that he watched and said 'yes, yes, he looks like him.' And he took a picture of our child [to compare] and said 'yes, he looks exactly like him'.

The couple called the broadcasting station that found out that the boy had another name and lived with an elderly couple in Jakarta. The television channel arranged a meeting and paid for the family to come to Jakarta to meet him. The elderly man who adopted him said that the boy was his grandson, but he could not answer the question of who his mother had been and where she was buried. Consequently the boy told about being in the middle of the sea. He recalled the tsunami and a trip he had made to the West-Acehnese city of Meulaboh when he was young. He could exactly describe the village they had visited. The Acehnese couple was sure he was their son as was later proved by DNA tests. However, Irma could not bring him back home. She called upon the governor's wife to plea for her in Jakarta with the Acehnese representatives in the capital, which she apparently did. But in the year that had followed they had not heard anything. She regularly insisted that they were poor and, by implication, powerless. Sometimes her now ten year old son would call her and say that she should have patience and that he would come home in the future, but she always felt that the people who adopted him were listening in.

Meanings in the post-tsunami climate

The stories of Ibu Irma and Ibu Nuraini, of Cut Marliani, Pak Hamdani, Pak Syarifuddin, and Ibu Asmara make it thinkable, probable, that 'many children are still living outside of Aceh.' They do so together with the memories of trucks full of children driving to Medan in the days after the tsunami, neighbors seeing children alive who later disappeared, and the lack of children's corpses among the many dead bodies. And they do so in a post-tsunami and post-conflict climate, in which people were missing and thousands of dead bodies were buried in mass graves. In the next chapter I will tell the story of a young man who was reunited with his only living younger brother only three months after the disaster. Irma found her son after more than three years. Missing did not necessarily mean dead. The rumors of child trafficking and children living outside Aceh are part of this climate. They are rumors because the extent to which they are true remains continuously uncertain, yet the possibility of them being true becomes part of the lived with everyday. Some common elements of the rumors seem to give them their particular force in the post-tsunami and post-conflict climate in which they are embedded. I think particularly of 'children', 'conversion', and 'outsiders'. I emphasize that even if the metaphorical quality of

these elements makes the rumor forceful in this particular climate, this does not mean that the rumor itself should be seen as a metaphor.

Some people told me that in theory it would be possible that an adult lost his or her memory or became in other ways mentally disturbed because of the tsunami. In that case it would be possible that this person was never found by the family and still living somewhere. However, I heard this only a few times and none of the people telling me this seemed to think that this could have happened to their family members. For children, this was totally different, as discussed above. Young children could have forgotten about their family, be in shock or at least powerless in relation to child traffickers or even well-meaning people who brought them to orphanages. Patricia Spyer (2004) shows how in post-Suharto Indonesia the figure of the child, on the loose and at risk, emerges in a climate of *reformasi* anxieties. Children are seen as the future of the nation (Spyer 2006b: 201), which is also highly symbolic in Indonesia, where society is to its leaders what children are to their parents – an innocent and immature group in need of guidance (Shiraishi 1997). Similarly, in the rumors of child trafficking after the tsunami, the child (the future society) is being taken away from the Acehnese nation and converted to another religion. So although the rumors of child trafficking may have many sources, their impact can be explained by the image of the trafficked and converted child being the ultimate attack on Acehnese and Islamic identity. It is telling that when the national government on January 5, 2005 banned adoption of Acehnese children, according to The Jakarta Post it did so because “it could be a sensitive matter as it often involves the issues of ethnicity and religion.”¹⁰⁵

This attack is one that clearly comes from ‘the outside’, something that has a long history in Aceh, where national identity was first formed as Indonesian and Islamic in the defense against the Dutch in the Aceh war and later as specifically Acehnese in the separatist conflict of the recent decades. Outsiders, especially people from Medan or from Java, coming to Aceh to steal rather than to help after the tsunami, are a returning theme in many people’s stories. It is rarely doubted that theft indeed occurred in post-tsunami Aceh. What interests me here is that everyone was totally certain that this could have been done only by outsiders.¹⁰⁶ Apart from ‘people from Medan’ it was sometimes the American ship (*Abraham Lincoln*) that was suspected of taking children away (after giving them medical aid or after saving them from the sea). Again, I think this emphasis on ‘outsiders’ should be seen as part of the infrastructure of the post-tsunami climate in which anxiety about the Acehnese identity and the future of (an Islamic) Aceh were experienced to be at stake (see chapter one).

¹⁰⁵ ‘Govt bans adoption to protect orphans’ *The Jakarta Post*, 5 January 2005.

¹⁰⁶ I am not arguing that this was not the case. Indeed, I heard about a criminal group from Surabaya that sent people to Aceh to steal (Chris Brown, personal communication).

Outside Aceh could be anywhere from Medan and Jakarta to Kuala Lumpur, the Netherlands, and Brazil. As I have emphasized above, the narration of any story is an intersubjective process. But, perhaps more than any other stories told to me, the remarks and stories on child trafficking implicated me as a researcher. Some people (like Ibu Wira and Ibu Nuraini) told me this hoping that I, as an outsider/non-Acehnese myself, would know more about it or at least would have the connections to find more information. On the level of representation, I felt that the rumors urged me to think not only about the epistemological grounds of my research, about knowledge and belief; truth and falsity. Through these questions I also came to feel a kind of ethical discomfort. Should I not indeed stop treating the rumors as rumors and try to find out what ‘really’ happened? Was this not what actually mattered to the people in Aceh but also to the Acehnese tsunami children who might be working as prostitutes or in slave labor somewhere? Then I realized that this is exactly what rumor does, the uncertainty that rumor creates. In short, the affect of rumor also had an effect on me.¹⁰⁷

Immobilization and the remaking of the everyday

Much of the recent anthropological accounts of rumor have been concerned with rumors in the context of violence (see for example Bubandt 2008, Das 2007, Spyer 2006b). In these contexts rumors have been mobilizing, effecting “anticipatory practices” leading to violence (Spyer 2006b). I have heard of many Acehnese parents who looked for their children in refugee camps for months after the tsunami and of some who have searched in orphanages in Medan and beyond. However, even though apparently many people thought it was possible that their children (or Acehnese children in general) had been taken away and were still living somewhere, there has been virtually no collective mobilization or organization to inquire into this possibility. Large international NGOs called the rumors ‘unsubstantiated’ and authorities kept quiet about the issue. Nils Bubandt (2008) has argued that mobilization and the affectivity of rumor can be effected through writing. Writing, he argues, not only gives authority to the rumor but also opens it up for contestation. Conversely, in Aceh I was surprised by the limited amount of media and NGO attention to the rumors of child trafficking. If anything was written about it, it only dealt with cases that were now clear, with children that were now taken care of by the state, rather than with the possibilities of the existence of other cases.

Where did this lack of attention and this apparent immobilization come from? I can only suggest some possible answers. One may be the extreme difficulty of finding out. I spoke to one woman who had been searching in orphanages in Medan and Jakarta for three years without finding her child. She said that she did find Acehnese children there. But how to identify these children (most of whom had been very young at the time of the

¹⁰⁷ I thank Maarten Onneweer for our discussions on this topic and for his helpful suggestions.

tsunami) and bring them back? Where to start? I also think of the case that was being investigated by the Irish Red Cross: the organization knew that the child had been sold because the trafficker had been caught, but the child was impossible to trace. The apparent difficulties of investigating such cases may account for the silence and even denial on the side of most governmental and non-governmental organizations.

For individuals it was of course even harder to find 'knowledge'. As some went to Medan to search, perhaps others asked people who might have more knowledge (such as a 'man with knowledge' or an occasional 'outsider' like me) for help. Hardly ever did this result in more certainty. Important is the way in which the rumors were often told; informally, as an alternative to the general understanding that the children were dead, often about what happened to others rather than referring to one's own doubts. Prayer, as Ibu Asmara mentioned and as we will see in the following chapter, was an important way of dealing with this uncertainty and of making it correspond with the dominant discourse of acceptance and leaving everything up to God. Acceptance was far more effective for the remaking of social worlds than doubt and uncertainty. The remarks and stories I encountered in the post-tsunami years, however, suggest that this uncertainty did not entirely disappear, that it lingered on, becoming a subjunctivizing element of the tsunami narratives, whether a hopeful or a disturbing part of everyday life.

According to Luise White, rumors can be explained in terms of what they reveal. She writes (2000: 44): "I am trying to do something different, looking not so much for the reasons behind make-believe as for what such beliefs articulate in a given time and place." In my account of the rumors of child trafficking I have tried to do something different again, by not looking at rumors as 'beliefs' at all, but as always uncertain and possibly true; indeed as not raising the question of believing or not believing, but effecting the ever lingering possibility of being true, effecting the subjunctivizing elements in narratives of loss.

Appearances

On June 13, 2010 the Acehnese newspaper *Serambi Indonesia* published an article titled 'The appearance of a young girl in the Tsunami Museum'.¹⁰⁸ The first paragraph introduces this conspicuous appearance:

The tsunami disaster that happened about six years ago has left several mysteries (*misteri*) and sad stories that are difficult to forget. Remarkably, several days ago, the face of a young girl, who is thought to be ten years old, was captured by the camera of a visitor to the Tsunami Museum building in the Blang Padang area in Banda Aceh.

¹⁰⁸ 'Penampakan Bocah di Museum Tsunami' *Serambi Indonesia*, June 13, 2010.

Although it is difficult to explain in a logical way (*sulit dikaitkan dengan logika*), the appearance was really there.

The article tells the story of a couple, Marwan and Elisa Putri, who visited the Tsunami Museum on the 22nd of May 2010 with their two children. Marwan took two pictures of a scale-model of the museum that was placed against the wall. On the first picture only the scale-model against the wall is visible. On the second picture, which was taken 23 seconds after the first because Elisa was afraid that the first picture went wrong, a young girl is seen to be standing behind the scale-model. This would be impossible, since the scale-model was placed against the wall. Moreover, the couple did not see the girl when taking the picture. They only found out about it when they transferred the pictures to their computer two days later. They waited for more than two weeks before telling their story to the newspaper, because they were afraid that people would come up with occult explanations (*penafsiran macam-macam yang berbau mistis*). However, finally they decided to tell their story and show the pictures, because the parents or other family members of the girl might be alive and might recognize her. Moreover, Elisa told the journalists, perhaps the girl wanted to show her face to her relatives. The article states that the girl in the picture seems to be covered with mud, and as the first paragraph that is quoted above makes clear, the connection with the tsunami was made from the start. In the article, emphasis is given to the statement of the newspaper's photo editors that the photographs have not been manipulated and are thus authentic (*asli*).

Although the story appeared on several blogs, on which some people reacted that they would pray for the child or that they hoped God would take care of her soul, I could not find a follow-up to it. Two things are especially striking in the story of the appearance of the girl in the Tsunami Museum. The first is the emphasis on the authenticity of the photograph coupled with Elisa emphasizing that she was afraid that people would come up with occult explanations. In her analysis of *wahyu* photographs, Karen Strassler points out that the photograph can not only prove a past event, but that "the camera also has the power to reveal that which truly exists but cannot be seen by the ordinary eye." (2010: 282). This seems to be exactly the case in the story of Marwan and Elisa. Like the journalist writing the article, they accept the authenticity of the photograph and the appearance that could only be captured by the camera. Yet, the uncertainty of how to explain the appearance accounts for its uncanniness. The journalist just states that 'it is difficult to explain in a logical way', but Elisa goes further by challenging accusations of occult practices in advance. She therefore emphasizes the option that the child just wanted to show her face – perhaps to her family to let them know what happened to her.

Elisa's reason to publish the photographs speaks directly to the memory of the missing and unidentified children, which, as this story brings to mind, is still very present in Aceh

today. It is interesting that the appearance happened in the Tsunami Museum, reinforcing the interpretation of the appearance of the child as that of a child who died in the tsunami. Importantly, this is a place authorized by the state which gives the appearance, for which people could have come up with occult explanations, a form of (state-authorized) legitimacy. Chapter four will explore the place of this museum as well as other monuments in Banda Aceh's urban space. With regard to the museum I will suggest that it was built as a monument to reconstruction rather than to the tsunami. The unplanned appearance of the child, however, shows that it may have many other meanings.

Conclusion

How do tsunami experiences become part of long-term post-tsunami remaking? In this chapter I have addressed this question by looking at the temporalities of narration and by focusing on the body as the site of experience through time, but also as the tool through which the out-of-the-ordinary tsunami is framed in relation to the remaking of everyday life.

I focused on the narrative experience of the tsunami, by showing how the narrated event (of the tsunami) and the narrative event (of telling about it) came together in present experience. The body brings together the memories and their narrative expressions. Time affects not only the different temporalities of narrative and narrated event, but also the years that separate them and that are also part of the process of remaking. When Pak Jamaluddin saw an eight year old girl, he imagined how his daughter would have changed in the years that had gone by. Yet, at the level of experience the tsunami may be much closer than those three years.

The tsunami stories were told from people's subjective positions; framed in relation to other narratives and told to a foreign researcher. Yet, although many collective elements could be discerned (such as common metaphors or sequences of narration), I have also been concerned with the gaps and ambiguities; with people's reflections on their own narratives and ways of narrating as well as with the subjunctivizing elements in narratives. The rumors about child trafficking make clear that 'remaking' is no straightforward process, that uncertainties and loss are part of the lived with everyday, but also that one aspect of remaking may be the recognition – however inchoate – that some things cannot be remade.

Finally, there are the bodies that are central to most tsunami stories I heard: dead bodies, wounded bodies, naked bodies, transformed bodies, missing bodies. They crucially informed the experience of the disaster as well as of the post-tsunami processes of grieving. Following Veena Das I have suggested that through the stories of the bodies the out-of-the-ordinariness of the tsunami is defined in relation to what is or ought to be ordinary. As I hope to have shown, this is a process rather than a set of binary oppositions. It is a process

of making and remaking; of narrating the past in the present and in relation to the future. Tsunami experience, in its narration as past event in relation to the continuous remaking of the everyday, is thus situated in the post-tsunami present.

The next chapter will continue to look at experience and loss by focusing on post-tsunami experiences of grieving. By looking at the process of grieving, we will see how in post-tsunami Aceh this process was closely entangled with people's religious subjectivities. As a central part of the process of post-tsunami remaking, grieving is shot through with Islam. The ethnographic approach of subjectivity will help us see how Islam shapes grieving processes while through these processes people subjectively shape and re-create lived religion.