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

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## Chapter three

### How to 'not always' remember: Islam and the process of grieving

*If you keep thinking about it [the tsunami], you cannot think about the future. Of course I think about it. At the moments in which I remember and in which I miss [them] I have my own way [of dealing with it]. I send prayers. Not to think about it does not mean forgetting. Sometimes I sit and remember; I go to the grave. When we remember, we send prayers. – Ibu Cut Marliani, Banda Aceh, June 2010 –*

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on post-tsunami grieving as an important dimension of the remaking of everyday life in Banda Aceh. While the previous chapter was concerned with narrative experiences of the tsunami, this chapter addresses the question of how people deal with the memories and losses of the disaster. By using the concept of 'grieving' I mean to grasp the encompassing process of dealing with loss, emotions, and memories, rather than a narrow focus on the emotional concept of 'grief' which is, as Wierzbicka (2004) has noted, specific to the English language. In dealing with loss, emotions, and memories people use practices, discourses, and ways of expression that are adopted from and intelligible to the social world, while at the same time in this process they remake the social world. Therefore I draw again on the concept of subjectivity, as elaborated in the introduction of this dissertation, in the analysis of this process. This chapter also relates to the other chapters in this dissertation in its focus on processes of remembering and forgetting. In Aceh, dealing with loss, emotions, and memories was often described in terms of remembering. Years after the tsunami people often said that they would never forget the disaster, but that they did not always think about it. Rather, they would remember at specific moments and through specific practices. As we will see in this chapter, the different ways of remembering as such as well as the active turn to specific ways of remembering are crucial to the process of grieving.<sup>109</sup> Arguably, the most important framework for grieving – and remembering –

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<sup>109</sup> The process I call 'grieving' here and that, as we will see, for many people entails a change towards a different way of remembering, has also been described as a change from 'mourning' to 'memorialization.' For example, Marilyn Ivy in her very insightful monograph on nostalgia in Japan states, drawing on Freud, that "[m]emorialization and mourning involve distinct ensembles of practices, narratives, and uses of language (...)." (1995: 149). It is the memorial practices that "allow the living to work through grief, to idealize the dead, and to substitute images of the person as really 'dead' for the memory of the person as he or she was in life." (*op.cit.*: 150). Mourning, on the other hand, is an "embodied recalling of the dead instead of a 'bracketed' remembering." (*op.cit.*: 163). This distinction clearly resonates with the change from 'not yet accepting' and 'always remembering' to acceptance and a different kind of remembering as described in this chapter. I prefer, however, to not make a clear distinction between the two different practices for two reasons. The first

in Aceh is Islam and in this chapter I will argue that Islamic beliefs and practices are closely meshed with the process of grieving.

According to a dominant discourse, articulated by religious leaders, intellectuals, and ordinary people, the people in Aceh rapidly overcame their grief after the tsunami because of their religious piety. Juxtaposing piety and grieving, this discourse seems to limit the possibilities for grieving as the norm is that one should not grieve since everything is in God's hand and we will all go back to Him.<sup>110</sup> However, when I asked people whether that meant that they were not sad at all they usually replied that of course they were sad; that is human (*itu manusia*). As I will show in this chapter, for many people dealing with this sadness through religious practices does not exclude grieving. Rather than denying grief, many people who used this discourse of religious piety referred to their religious beliefs when speaking of their pain and loss. Religious practices of prayer and almsgiving (to orphans) were often spoken about as a reaction to as well as part of remembering and being sad. In this chapter I argue therefore that rather than the marked opposite of grieving or simply a coping mechanism, Islamic practices form an important dimension of grieving and the making and remaking of everyday life. Moreover, Islamic practices are informed by the specific post-disaster context and in this chapter I will engage with the question of what Islam looks like when it is practiced in the context of grieving. In short, the chapter explores how grieving, rather than somehow being "outside" religion, is intertwined with religion in multiple ways.

My arguments in this chapter draw on the concept of subjectivity as indicated in the introduction of the dissertation, as well as on anthropological theories of Islamic subjectivity (George 2010, Mahmood 2001a, 2001b, 2005, Simon 2009), morality (Zigon 2009a, 2009b), emotions (Beatty 2005, 2010, Boellstorff and Lindquist 2004, Good 2004), and narratives (Steadly 1993, Tsing 1993). I build on the insights about narratives, experiences and subjectivity from the previous chapter and in the conclusion I suggest that grieving as a process of giving memory a place so as to 'not always' remember offers insights into 'subjectivity as becoming' (Biehl and Locke 2010), a process of becoming that arguably becomes more pressing in times of crisis and transition. After introducing my theoretical positioning in the field of emotions, subjectivity, Islam and morality I will start with an account of one of my friends' tsunami stories, after which I will bring in stories of many other people in Aceh to explore different dimensions of grieving. These dimensions

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is that the Indonesian language does not recognize such a distinction and although people discuss many changes in the process of grieving (such as acceptance, *stres/trauma*, sincerity) they do not have to come all at once as the separation of mourning and memorialization suggests. Secondly, based on the stories in this chapter, I think of the process of grieving as a continuous process rather than more or less clearly demarcated phases. Indeed, people talk about it in terms of feeling better 'step by step' or 'day by day' and involving an ongoing process of working on themselves and remaking their lives.

<sup>110</sup> In the 1960s James Siegel noted a similar juxtaposition of piety and grieving for the dead in Aceh, in which mourning was described as sinful (2000 [1969]: 107).

include the experience of *trauma* and *stres*; remaking the self and society through ethical reflection and religious practices; the figure of the orphan; remembering through objects and photographs – and their absences. The chapter will end with an ethical reflection on understanding grieving and the role of narratives and silences therein.

### *Subjectivity, Islam, morality*

In the introduction to this dissertation, I proposed to study the remaking of post-disaster everyday life through a focus on the construction of subjectivity. In this chapter, I will do so by analyzing the process of grieving that I find to be entangled with the creation of Islamic subjectivities. The focus on subjectivity leads me to analyze grieving as individual and social at the same time, by recognizing that “investigations of the social life of emotions should incorporate studies of individuals” and that there is an “enormous diversity in the way individuals appropriate symbolic forms related to emotions and emotional experience.” (Good, 2004: 4). My approach brings together insights from recent studies of Islamic subjectivities, morality and emotions.

Many recent studies of Islamic subjectivities have been influenced by Saba Mahmood’s work on a women’s piety movement in Egypt (2001a, 2001b, 2005). Mahmood shows how members of the Egyptian women’s mosque movement actively shape their sentiments and intentions through ritual worship, while correct ritual worship is also an end in itself. This form of disciplining the body, she argues, does not result in a repression of the self under social control: “(...) formal behavior, in the context of the movement I have discussed, is a condition of the emergence of the self as such and integral to its realization.” (Mahmood, 2001b: 845). It is embodied action, then, that “does not simply represent a self but endows the self with various kinds of capabilities that form the background of moral and political judgement.” (*ibid.*). In Aceh, when talking about memory and sadness, many people mentioned different Islamic practices (not only *shalat*) as their way of dealing with these feelings and memories. Mahmood’s approach informs my analysis in this chapter of the ways in which different Islamic practices become part of embodied and carefully cultivated religious subjectivities. In the section on ‘remaking the self and society’ I will show how the Islamic embodied dispositions of *pasrah* (surrender, acceptance) and *ikhlas* (sincerity) are for many people crucial in the process of dealing with their grief.

However, Mahmood’s work has been criticized for focusing only on very pious women and not paying attention to the tensions and ambiguities that are part of the everyday lives of Muslims (Marsden 2005, Schielke 2009a, 2009b, 2010, Simon 2009). Also, too much emphasis on the embodiment of religion may obscure the fact that Muslims all over the world also have intellectual discussions on piety and practices (Marsden 2005). Therefore, it may be more helpful to look broadly at what Kenneth George calls “Muslim lifeworlds” and see Islam as “a lived religion: lived, re-imagined, and remade through the

intermingling of believers' lifeworlds with all their predicaments, contradictions, and contingencies." (George 2010: 136). I think these criticisms are highly valuable and I will return to them in chapter five. Here, I would like to suggest that to take into account moral ambiguities, tensions and contradictions in Muslim lifeworlds, it is fruitful to look beyond the study of Islamic piety or even the Islamic everyday by looking at morality and ethics more broadly.

Although Islam is a central aspect of the process of working on the self in Aceh, it is certainly not the only dimension. The topics and narrative tropes in this chapter give a sense of the variety of public discourses and institutions that people use in this reflective process. Using Zigon's (2009a, 2009b) theoretical framework of morality and ethics, the latter of which is the process of reflection on the self in which people create themselves as moral persons, I will show that Islam is one of the most important of these discourses and institutions. By doing so, I emphasize that although my ethnographic study shows that Islam is highly important in the process of grieving (as it is to subjectivity in Aceh more broadly), it is so within a broader moral arena. Importantly, in the subjective, reflective process of grieving, people not only remake their selves and subjectivities, while adapting, enacting and changing public and institutional discourses, but they also remake and change institutions and discourses through their ethical reflection and reorientation in the social world. Thus, what I hope to point out in this chapter is that Islam not only informs the grieving process, it is also modified – albeit perhaps only slightly – through it.

### *Emotions*

In recent decades, debates on the anthropology of emotion have moved between universalist and cultural relativist positions (Beatty 2005, Boellstorff and Lindquist 2004, Wierzbicka 2004). Anthropologists have shown that emotions, rather than being something purely individual, are socially constructed (Lutz 1988, Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990, M. Rosaldo 1984, Scheper-Hughes 1992) and mediated through language (Wierzbicka 2004). As Michelle Rosaldo has put it "[f]eelings are not substances to be discovered in our blood but social practices organized by stories that we both enact and tell." (M. Rosaldo 1984; quoted in Boellstorff and Lindquist 2004). Against cultural relativist positions, anthropologists Renato Rosaldo (1989) and later Unni Wikan (1992) have proposed a more universalist stance that, as Beatty (2005: 20) has put it, puts its faith "in empathy and resonance, even intuition; a feeling-with the native based on common or analogous experience. This approach supposes "the psychic unity of mankind" (*ibid.*).<sup>111</sup>

Andrew Beatty fears that anthropologists can never really understand emotions in another cultural context and should therefore just study emotional 'practices' (2005). Yet this assumes that there are (relatively) bounded cultures instead of looking at the individual

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<sup>111</sup> For a more elaborate overview on these positions see Beatty (2005) and Hollan (2008).

and the social as continuously influencing each other and thus at subjectivity as ‘becoming’ (Biehl and Locke 2010). From this dynamic perspective in which emotions are “embodied yet foundationally social” (Boellstorff and Lindquist 2004, see also Good 2004), the anthropologist engages intersubjectively and can therefore try to understand the emotions of others. More strongly, it is exactly the task of anthropologists to always try to expand the limits of understanding and imagination (Biehl and Locke 2010). Beatty (2010) argues that the best way to create understanding of emotions is to take a narrative approach and tell a story, with a history, characters and a plot. Although I agree that narratives can offer a lot of insights, it is not only from “particular dramas” that are “observable, dramatic, evolving, and highly revealing” (Beatty, 2010: 439) that we can gain understanding of emotions. As Biehl and Locke (2010) show, this kind of understanding we also get through people’s life stories, their own words, and the intersubjective relations with the researcher. A narrative approach does not eschew analysis and analysis does not necessarily diminish narrative understanding. Finally, we should pay attention to what is not being said, the unspeakable and unspoken (Good 2012) and the unthinkable (Spyer 2010). We should be extremely aware of the limits of narrative possibility. As Mary Steedly so aptly points out: “[c]onventions of narrative expression, emplotment, and plausibility not only construct events (...) but also construct the *exclusion* of events from the field of narrative possibility.” (Steedly 1993: 30, emphasis in original). I will return to this issue at the end of this chapter.

In short, I think that an epistemological position of intersubjectivity, in which the anthropological learning is always relational is not only crucial to the anthropological effort in general (Davies and Spencer 2009) but also to the study of emotions in the field of subjectivity in particular (Good 2004). This stance acknowledges that empathy may cause both resonance and dissonance (Throop 2010b), but in either way it may make understanding possible. It is the understanding of the particular emotions of grieving as they were experienced and narrated by the people I spoke with in Aceh that is the aim of this chapter. Based on my interviews and conversations and on the more extensive narration of one person’s story, I hope to show that what is important and narratable for many people is the *process of dealing with* loss, memories, experiences, and emotions – a process I gloss as grieving. I argue that these emotional processes are embodied and social; through them, people remake the self, navigate through and give shape to the social world. As should become clear, people in Aceh deal with these losses, experiences, memories, and emotions in many different ways that are nonetheless socially related and subjectively created. By situating my analysis in between social processes and individual experiences – without juxtaposing them (Good 2004) – I hope to create some understanding of post-tsunami emotional and religious ‘remaking.’

In this chapter I draw extensively on the story of Ibu Cut Marliani, a woman in her mid-thirties with whom I have developed a very warm friendship over the years. My main reason for quoting her story at length is that I hope the long narrative will increase possibilities for understanding her subjectivity and ways of dealing with emotions in religious ways as connected to her social life and experiences. Her story is not ‘typical’ (Tsing 1993) – I do not think any of the stories or people in this chapter, or this dissertation, are. Like Anna Tsing (*ibid.*: 224), I do want to write about an unusual story and about personal experience, while Cut Marliani’s story at the same time speaks to what I think is a broader social and embodied process in which memory, experience, religion, and emotion come together in specific ways. By narrating Cut Marliani’s story I do not aim to essentialize a gendered account. I do not think that her subjectivity speaks against male-centered discourses and subordination (Mahmood 2001a). Rather, I would argue that her story includes dominant discourses in society – amongst others discursive frames of ‘strong Acehnese’, religious piety and positioning, and grieving. Although I do suggest that it may be easier for women than for men to express sadness – either with friends or in public gatherings – this does not mean that talking about loss, emotions, and memory is impossible for men. I will therefore in this chapter include and reflect on accounts of some Acehnese men. I am aware of the gendered bias and limits of my own position as a young foreign woman. However, this biased position may make the fact that some of my male friends and interlocutors did tell me about their emotions even more relevant to this analysis.

### **Cut Marliani’s story**

I met Cut Marliani, her husband Husaini, her sister Dahlia and neighbor Fatma during my second week in Aceh and we have been friends ever since. During our first meeting the three women told me their tsunami stories. Dahlia and Fatma were hit by the tsunami water and barely survived. They showed me their scars. Cut Marliani had left that Sunday morning together with her husband to visit an inland village. Her only child, whom she left home with her family, did not survive the tsunami. Cut Marliani and Dahlia lost their parents, two sisters and a brother, nieces and nephews, and in-laws. Of their family the two of them and Cut Marliani’s husband Husaini survived together with one older brother, some extended family members who live elsewhere and an orphaned niece, Maryam, who now lives with them. Most of Fatma’s family lives elsewhere and survived the disaster, but she lost her only child in the tsunami waves. One year after the tsunami she gave birth to a daughter. As neighbors, Fatma, Dahlia, and Cut Marliani often shared household activities and spent much time together. Since that first afternoon I have often joined their families in everyday activities as well as on outings and at parties. Cut Marliani was always keen on teaching me about Acehnese culture, answering my questions as well as telling and retelling



her own story and the stories she heard from others. As an active community member she had a very broad social network to draw on. Although I use the many informal conversations and experiences with her to frame the context of her story, the narrative and quotations below are mainly drawn from a series of interviews I did with her in early June 2010.

Cut Marliani is *orang asli* (original inhabitant, see chapter one) of an (administrative) village of about 2000 residents just outside the municipal borders of Banda Aceh. Her family has since long fulfilled important positions in the village leadership and in village rituals. Cut Marliani herself is involved in all kinds of village activities. She represents the village in the district *posyandu*<sup>112</sup> and assists mothers, their babies and small children in the village. She is always invited to (and present at) festivities of neighborhood residents. Not unimportantly, she is fond of cooking and particularly good at it, helping out with cooking whenever one of her many friends, neighbors, or family members organizes a festive meal (*kenduri*) or gives a wedding party or other ceremonial party. She participates in several weekly Qur'an recitation groups (*pengajian*) and is an active member of at least two monthly *arisan* (women's rotating credit groups) in support of which she often helps with the cooking. She is always present when a family holds a prayer session for the dead and together with another 'original' woman in the neighborhood set up a saving system from which funeral expenses are paid in case of the death of someone from the neighborhood. She always makes sure that by noon she has the most delicious food on her kitchen table. Cut Marliani's husband, Pak Husaini, comes from Bireuen (North Aceh) and moved in with her family after the wedding, which is a widespread custom in matrifocal Aceh. He had a small lumber business and recently (after the tsunami) opened a shop. They are neither rich nor poor. Not rich enough to seriously beautify their tsunami aid house, not as poor as to have to worry about daily food. Cut Marliani usually describes themselves as *orang biasa*, normal people – in contrast to *PNS*, civil servants. They have a small compound with four tsunami houses that replaced the houses of their family members who died. Cut Marliani and Husaini, Dahlia and Maryam, the (in 2010) fourteen year old niece who was orphaned in the tsunami, live together in one tsunami house. The other houses they use for larger group gatherings and for storage. Their neighbor Fatma lives across the road with her husband and young daughter. I will quote a part of Cut Marliani's tsunami story as she told it to me in 2010:

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<sup>112</sup> The *posyandu* is a village level institution that controls, informs, and influences people's reproductive activities. Its main functions are to provide information, medicines, vaccinations and social activities for mothers and children.

Actually, it was like this: before the tsunami, indeed one month before the tsunami, I had a feeling. That feeling is what Acehnese people call a vision (*ada nampak*). That means that you foresee something, but it is not clear what it will be. So one night I had a dream. I dreamed that I was at the side of the road and at that roadside suddenly there was the sea. Suddenly – that was in a dream Anne – suddenly at the right side there was the sea. I looked in the direction of the sea and suddenly the sea started to rise, on and on and on until it touched the sky. I looked up and I was deep down there and deep in my heart (*dalam hati kecil*) [I said] oh God oh Lord, oh Lord, if that water falls to where I am standing, how about the people (*bagaimana masyarakat*)? Everything will be gone. That was in a dream. So I woke up in the middle of the night and I forgot the dream. One month later the tsunami happened and only then did I remember: oh, before the tsunami I once dreamed about it. That means that my dream proved to be true (*kenyataan*).

So this is my story. On that Saturday night [before the tsunami] our whole family came together. Actually everybody was there. My father and mother, my sister, everybody in those five houses here. On that Saturday evening we [Cut Marliani and her husband] planned to go out the next morning. That evening everyone had a feeling (*punya perasa*). My father acted very strangely that evening; he did not say anything, he was just quiet.

She went on, telling me about the strange behavior of different family members that night. Her own daughter Anisah repeatedly asked to come with her parents on their trip the next day but Cut Marliani argued that it would be too dangerous. The ten year old daughter repeatedly kissed her and told her that she would not need any money for (school) books anymore. Cut Marliani said that perhaps her daughter had felt what was coming; that her last day had come. In the course of my field research many people have told me about foretelling feelings and dreams that only in retrospect could be connected to the disaster. In chapter five I will elaborate on how these prophecies take a special place in a temporal worldview that connects the present to the past and the (predestined) future. Here, it is important to note how these prophecies are an integral part of Cut Marliani's tsunami story, showing how the death of her family members was inevitable.

She continued to tell me how early in the morning she went off with her husband, taking only a little money, and feeling the earthquake when they were already far away from Banda Aceh. She tried to call home with her mobile phone but she could not make the connection. At that point in the narrative she switched to the stories of others, telling Dahlia's story and Fatma's and those of six other survivors. Let me quote a short fragment:

Tipa has another story. She held on to a tree but was taken by the water, like Dahlia. And the sister of Deliana, who was beautiful; people say that after the first wave they saw her floating on a door. After the second wave they did not see her anymore. There were others who survived, like Einun; she already saw the first wave coming from the entrance to the neighborhood where she was standing. She had a six months old baby. She was hit by the water in the first wave and she lost the baby immediately. The cloth, the batik cloth in which she carried the baby, came loose. She was turned around in the water and swam and called out: where is my child! And the water came in, 'where is my child! Where is my child!' She did not find the child. She swam in the water, her mouth was shut [she could not call anymore]. Her husband was also taken by the water, but later they met again in the mosque. The child was gone.

Finally and upon my questioning, she returned to her own story. She told me how she found out about the disaster when they were on the road near the town of Sigli on Aceh's east coast.

I saw the sea and it was as if a dark cloud of smoke was rising. Many waves approached the land. I urged my husband, go faster faster faster, I was already crying. And at that moment I remembered my family. I had not thought about them during the earthquake, ah I get goose bumps now [when telling this]. I tried to call with my cell phone, *ya Allah*, my God, I wanted to call my child, but that was not possible anymore, Anne; I called when they were in the water trying to save themselves.

They returned to Banda Aceh, although people on the road told them they could not go there because the city had drowned. Approaching their neighborhood, they were told that they could not go any further and therefore they went to a neighboring village, L.

There, I felt like being in a dream. In L. the bodies were everywhere on the road; on the crossings. On the first day there were already six thousand of them. So I went to the mosque, *Subhanallah* praise God. The mosque was full of mud. The corpses were uncountable; the space outside the mosque was also full. There were more than six thousand on that first day. There, I was going to faint [she shows me how she almost fell]. I could not talk anymore when I saw those bodies. It was so shocking. [she shouts] 'Ya Allah, my God, where is my child?' Like this; I could not stop; I could not stand anymore and I was fainting. My husband held onto me and said 'be strong, be strong, be strong.' We met a friend there. Some people could not handle the situation, Anne! Ah, it was so sad. There were people [crying], where is my child? Are my parents among the dead bodies in the mud? Is this my mother, is this my father? No. Has my

child become a corpse [*apa anak aku udah jadi mayat*]? Is this my child? No. That is how people were looking. So I met a friend; her name is Nun. We left everything to God and we did not think anymore.

Cut Marliani continuously draws on stories, experiences and words of others to create her own narrative. In the quoted passage above, she enacts how she screamed “*Ya Allah*, my God, where is my child?” and it immediately mixes with other people calling out the same words. Although she did not physically experience the tsunami waves, the stories of her friends and family members are as much hers as the story of Cut Marliani and her husband driving to Sigli. I suggest that through these stories she becomes part of a social suffering (Kleinman et al. 1997) just as the collective tsunami experience becomes her (narrative) experience. The other stories thicken and deepen her own experiences. It is one of the moments in her story through which we see very clearly how subjectivity is created. It is the particular collective and social suffering that, together with the very different nature of the violence inflicted, is one of the factors that makes post-tsunami grieving different from post-conflict grieving. Below I will briefly draw on the comparison and relation between the two within the framework of post-disaster mental health. Let me now return to the next part of Cut Marliani’s story.

She related how they drove around in the parts of Banda Aceh that had been spared to look for surviving family members. At night they stopped at a house of someone they did not know and asked for some water. The owner turned out to be originally (*asli*) from the same area as Cut Marliani’s husband and asked them to stay for the night. There she dreamed of her daughter. In her dream her daughter came to her and said that she should not worry anymore. That she was near their house and that they could take her there. When Cut Marliani woke up she told her husband that she had the feeling their daughter was dead. Then she prayed:

We have the *Yasin*.<sup>113</sup> It is like reciting [the Qur’an] while praying. There I prayed full of sincere intentions [*niat*], it came from my heart; “O God, if my child is still alive, please bring her back to me safely. If she is already dead, please bring back her body.” When I prayed like that, suddenly a ray of light came from outside into my head.

She interrupted the story to tell me about the second and third days after the tsunami. How they met some family members and decided to settle near the mosque of a village near the airport. Then she returned to the story about the prayer and told me that this actually happened on the fourth day.

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<sup>113</sup> *Ya Sin* is the 36<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Qur’an. It is often recited in commemoration of the dead.

So when I was reciting *Yasin* suddenly there was this ray of light. My husband came home and ran towards me; 'I found our child', he said. I thought she was still alive and in the car, so I ran to the car; I wanted to hold her in my arms. But then he said: 'she is gone.' At that moment I started to cry uncontrollably. I held onto my husband. '*Allah!* O God! My only child has been taken! I am sincere, *ya Allah*, [I have to] be sincere [*ikhlas*].' I said that and I cried and screamed. All right, all right, my husband said. He said, *alhamdulillah* thank God. Although she is gone, we still found her body so we know where her grave will be. Other people did not find the body and do not even know where the grave is.

After telling how her husband found their daughter's body her story moved more rapidly through time. She told me about the following days, months, and years. And at different points we talked about dealing with the loss of her daughter and parents. Religious practices were an important part of this process. The notion of *ikhlas* (sincerity) and the way Cut Marliani urged herself to be sincere (*ikhlas*) in the acceptance of her daughter's death was very important for her – something to which I will return later. In the rest of this chapter I will draw again on these and other parts of Cut Marliani's story. Let me first return to the topic of grieving and discuss the often used concepts of *trauma* and *stres*.

### ***Trauma, stres, and public expressions of grieving***

Many of my friends and interlocutors talked with me about their loss and the way they dealt with the loss of their loved ones.<sup>114</sup> In these conversations they often used the concepts of *trauma* and *stres*, concepts that in Aceh have a notably different meaning than Western understandings of trauma and stress but that play an important role in the 'narrative experience' (Steadly 1993) of post-tsunami grieving. As we will see in this section and in the rest of the chapter, *trauma* and *stres*, but also children, orphans and religious concepts and dispositions such as *pasrah* and *ikhlas* can be seen as tropes through which experience is narrated.

Cut Marliani told me that after the tsunami she worked together with psychologists from Jakarta for about two years. She acted as a broker between clients and psychologists. In the thirteen villages of her district – which she knew well because of her *asli* status and community activities – she would look for people with psychological problems and bring them into contact with the psychologists. I am interested in the way she talks about the clients as people 'who cannot yet accept it' (*belum bisa menerima*):

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<sup>114</sup> Some did explicitly not talk about it – something to which I will return towards the end of this chapter.

If it is for friends, we look first what the problem is, right? If he or she for example still remembers and cannot accept it with sincerity (*ikhlas*), than we try to give this person some of our knowledge. (...) We talk and give advice to people who cannot yet accept it. (...) So I went to the houses of people who have trauma; the people who could not accept it.

Later Cut Marliani also told me about children whom she brought into contact with the psychologists. But she emphasized that as far as she knew at the time of the conversation (five years after the tsunami) there was no one left who had these problems – who could not accept. When I asked her about the symptoms of people ‘who could not accept’ she explained: “I did not find anyone who was like screaming and could not sleep at night. It was more like having difficulties with forgetting, being afraid of earthquakes or storms. So it was mainly fear, difficulties of forgetting, and always remembering.” In both this quote and the one above Cut Marliani talks about psychological problems of tsunami survivors as problems with ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’. As I argue throughout this chapter, the process of grieving and the changes in this process are often described in terms of moving to a different way of remembering. Many people I spoke with acknowledged that they would never forget the tsunami – that the memory would stay with them for the rest of their lives. However, this was a different *kind* of remembering than the ‘always remembering’ as Cut Marliani described it.<sup>115</sup> In the epigraph of this chapter I quoted Cut Marliani saying that “[N]ot to think about it does not mean forgetting”. Always remembering and continuously thinking about it would cause mental health problems. Moving to a different kind of remembering in which memories find a ‘place’ or narrative frame and only come to the fore in certain contexts and at certain moments is, I suggest, a central part of the grieving process and informs many of the practices discussed in this chapter.

Earlier in the conversation I had asked Cut Marliani whether there were people who got depressed after the tsunami. She answered:

There are people who for example do not want to hear the stories anymore. They cannot hear about it; maybe because [after hearing the stories] they feel sad again. But that does not mean that this person has *stres*. Perhaps he or she is sad, does not want to

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<sup>115</sup> This ‘always remembering’ could be seen as the kind of remembering that has not yet found a place or a narrative frame. These narrative frames or ‘places’ are, as I show in this chapter, created through and across cultural practices rather than universal. Kirmayer (1996) argues that these social models of memory shape ‘landscapes of memory.’ Lambek (1996) adds that this cultural mediation of memory has to be seen as a moral practice.

hear about it. For example, I have a friend who starts to cry when people talk about her child. Those people are certainly there.

But, she added, there are no people who really get sick, who “sit and stare without talking”:

Perhaps this is because we are so strong, God knows. He gave this disaster to Aceh because Acehnese are so strong; they can handle it (*sanggup*). So there were none of those people [with mental illness] at that time. Perhaps tomorrow they will be there, I do not know. But it has been five years now and in Aceh there is no one who kills himself because he cannot stop thinking about his family and does not know where the grave is and does not know where his children are, so he gets *stres* and kills himself. No one yet. Perhaps because it was a short *trauma* at the time, everyone had it. But there is no *stres* that makes people crazy, or that makes them kill themselves.

Cut Marliani emphasized that she does not know people who are still severely mentally disturbed by the tsunami experience, but that does not mean that people are not sad anymore. As we will see below, quite some people I spoke with told me that they were still afraid and that they remembered the disaster every day. I relate Cut Marliani's remark that she did not know anyone who still had the problems of the first years to her argument that no Acehnese experienced *stres* or killed him/herself. She emphasizes how quickly people got over their mental problems through talking to her or the psychologists. I suggest that the need to show how oneself and others got 'to accept' the disaster quickly is part of a subjective experience of the collective discourse on strong and pious Acehnese who do not get crazy. As in Cut Marliani's story, this does not mean that there is no place for grieving and sadness at all – people say that this is 'human' (*manusia*). This grieving is carefully put outside the boundaries of medical problems.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, as we will see below, it is through *dealing with* grief that people practice their piety. Think back to the moment that Cut Marliani found out that her daughter was dead. She told me that she cried and cried and thought 'I have to be sincere (*ikhlas*) and accept it'. Below I will argue that the experience of the process of getting 'to accept it' is for many people crucial in the creation *and* emotional experience of their moral selves. But first we will look at the concepts of *stres* and *trauma*.

### *Stres*

The concept of *stres* is in Aceh often used to describe severe mental disturbances. A person with *stres* is like a person who is 'crazy', but perhaps in a more dangerous way. Cut Marliani said that a person with *stres* could kill him- or herself. This person could also

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<sup>116</sup> One reason for this may be that medical discourse often individualizes mental health (and memory, see Antze and Lambek 1996), whereas grieving as 'human' points to a collective experience.

attack and kill others.<sup>117</sup> Other and less dangerous meanings of *stres* are also known in Banda Aceh, but are less frequently used. My understanding of the concepts of *trauma* and *stres* as they were used in Banda Aceh is similar to what Grayman, Good and Good find in their study of PTSD among conflict victims in Aceh: “One might be suffering from *trauma* but still be present and at least appearing functional in the community, whereas when someone has *stres*, he or she is noticeably debilitated from performing everyday social roles.” (Grayman et al. 2009: 299)

Although many people told me that now, years after the disaster, none of the survivors suffered from severe mental disturbances caused by the disaster, this was different for some people’s descriptions of the first days and weeks.<sup>118</sup> They often emphasized that most people took up their everyday activities as quickly as possible. Some people, however, referred to the condition of themselves and others as *shock* or *stres*. I noticed that people talked much less frequently about an immediate post-tsunami condition of distress than about the subsequent process of dealing with grief and trauma. I do not intend here to suppose that all people who experience a disaster suffer from distress in its aftermath only to go on to find out why so few people talk about it. But I do think it is important to draw attention to some stories about distress. Even if there are only few of them they show the need to take post-disaster psychological assistance seriously.

Ibu Elli, whom I introduced in the previous chapter, told me how she searched for the bodies of her parents for days after the disaster. She told me about the people with *stres* whom she met during these days. The first was a friend of her who is still *kurang pas*, not normal. Elli suggests that this is because her head was injured in the tsunami. She also met a man in the mosque who was talking to himself and gazing at nothing. He wanted to hold her daughter but she did not give her to him. He had *stres*, she said, but at that point she added that perhaps she also had *stres*, considering the strange ways in which she talked to her husband and children at the time, her careless dressing and the way in which she went

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<sup>117</sup> Newspaper articles such as “Youth with *stres* attacks citizens”, about a young man suffering from mental disturbances, confirm this meaning of *stres*. ‘Pemuda stres serang warga.’ *Serambi Indonesia*, 21 January 2011.

<sup>118</sup> Souza et al. (2007) found high levels of PTSD (Posttraumatic Stress Disorder) in a survey done in 2005 among villagers affected by both the conflict and the tsunami. Grayman et al. (2009) found high levels of PTSD in post-conflict villages in a 2006 study. I did no systematic survey of PTSD levels in Banda Aceh, but my initial findings from the qualitative research suggest that people report only few symptoms encountered by Grayman et al. – and if so only the less severe ones (such as “remembering what happened” and “thinking too much”, Grayman et al. 2009: 299). Similarly, although a significant number of people in the study of Grayman et al. reported having “bad dreams” about the conflict (although not necessarily part of ‘trauma’), the people I spoke with about the tsunami upon my questioning about dreams only reported “good dreams”, if at all (see the section on dreams and spirits later in this chapter). Moreover, many people themselves suggested that the conflict had been much more traumatic for Aceh than the tsunami, since the conflict trauma was related to severe violence inflicted by people, while the tsunami was given by God. Based on these findings, it is possible that the decades of conflict indeed have had much more severe effects on mental health than the tsunami.



without food and water during the long hours of searching. Finally, in a refugee camp she met a woman who had lost her child and could not stop crying. She wanted to help this woman by telling her that children were innocent and God had taken her child because He loved it. Moreover, the spirit of the child was still here and would not want to see the mother cry. But, Elli remembers, while she was telling the woman not to cry she was crying herself.

Let me turn to a totally different conversational context. One day during a rather long bus-drive in one of Banda Aceh's *labi-labi* (minibuses) the driver, Mirza, told me the following story. At the time of the tsunami, he was in his early twenties and lived with his parents and seven brothers and sisters in a village just outside Banda Aceh's municipal boundaries. The tsunami waves took him many kilometers inland and his leg was severely injured. He told me he liked to play soccer when he was young, but his injuries had made that impossible. He did not meet up with any of his family members after the tsunami and thought they were all gone. Only after three months did a friend tell him that he had seen his younger brother in a refugee camp and after searching for a week he found him. He was incredibly happy, but, he says, the *trauma* was still enormous. He even had *stres*. At that time, he did not want to do anything anymore; he did not even want to think. In our conversation he emphasized that it was not that the people in Aceh did not want to work during these first couple of months, they just *could not* work. Three years later, he lived with his younger brother, who was fifteen, in his old village. Of the 1200 residents only 300 survived. "There are more houses than people," he said. And there were hardly any women left; he wondered how he would find a girlfriend. He was driving the *labi-labi* to be able to send his younger brother to school. And, he said, because it is better to work. Just sitting in his house would make him crazy because of the grief. I asked him how he could endure this (*bagaimana tahan*) and he replied that sometimes he just did not; that the sadness overwhelmed him.

The condition of *stres* seems to make the remaking of an everyday impossible. Both Mirza and Elli, as well as many other people I spoke with, emphasized that working and having other things to do was necessary to avoid *stres* or sadness in general. Ahmad, the young man and broker whom we met in chapter one, put it the other way around, telling me: "I do not think about the tsunami anymore, otherwise I could not work." When I asked people when they most strongly remembered the disaster and the people whom they had lost, they often answered that they were sad when they were alone. Cut Marliani said: "If I have no activities, the memory certainly comes back to me. Especially in the early morning when I am alone. So I want to fill the day with activities."

In chapter one I described how after the tsunami most people quickly took up everyday tasks and made informed decisions, for example concerning where to live and where to go

for medical treatment. Cut Marliani told me she started to cook with two other women for a group of twenty-five men only three days after the tsunami. And both Cut Marliani and Elli said that they started to worship regularly again within a couple of days. That should not lead us to think that there was no such thing as distress. Mirza said that for the first couple of months he could not do anything and Elli suggested that perhaps, in going without food, talking strangely to her husband and crying while looking at dead bodies for days, she behaved not so dissimilar from the people with *stres* whom she just discussed.

### *Trauma*

The concept of *trauma* was much more often used in relation to the tsunami. It was used as a general concept to describe the condition of people who had experienced the tsunami or the conflict, or another major crisis in their lives. Upon my questioning about remembering and thinking about the tsunami, some people answered that ‘everyone here has trauma’, which echoes the remarks of the conflict victims studied by Grayman et al. (2009).<sup>119</sup> People also described what trauma meant for them; for example fear<sup>120</sup> and a thumping heart in case of an earthquake or bad weather. Ibu Hamidah, who lost the youngest of her three children, said for example:

Sometimes when I (*kita*) remember... I cannot forget it, because I experienced it myself, right? If I am here [in my house] alone, I remember and I am sad, I cry. That is when I remember my child who is gone (*hilang*). When I remember that, I am so sad, so sad and I cry. I do not want this anymore (*nggak usah lagi inilah*). But I have to go on; otherwise I will be sad all the time, right? But perhaps the *trauma* is still there. If there is an earthquake my heart goes faster. How could it be otherwise; I saw those high waves! I mean that I still remember. What is more, when there is the sound of an airplane, it is like the sound of the water. Then I am afraid.

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2012, when I was in Aceh, a heavy earthquake caused a tsunami warning upon which many people fled from the coasts. No tsunami happened, but the next

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<sup>119</sup> As Grayman et al. (2009) point out, the concept has thoroughly been absorbed in local understandings of mental health. Siegel (1998) shows how from the 1980s onwards the concept became more and more common in Indonesia, its meanings being related to foreignness and violence. Interestingly, he notes that in that context “trauma” was something that could be cured (by the authorities) and therefore notably differed from its psychoanalytic usage. Although the meaning of the concept in his analysis may differ from the current usage in Aceh, in Aceh *trauma* is still something that is curable and may go away when time passes (notice that people say that they *still* have trauma, already suggesting the possibility that it goes away). Arguably, however, rather than state authorities, in Banda Aceh it is religious practices that can cure the trauma (see below).

<sup>120</sup> Grayman et al. (2009: 300) also note that people describe “fear” (*takut*) as a common symptom of trauma.

day many people used the word *trauma* again to describe the fear they experienced after the earthquake.

In my conversations years earlier, people often referred to the *trauma* of others; for example to their neighbors who would not come back to their reconstructed neighborhoods because of *trauma*. On the other hand, many people told me that they were not afraid anymore. Often they said that they were not afraid, because death is already predestined – it could happen near the sea but also near the mountains (see chapter five). Others said that chances were slim that such a big disaster would strike again, or they said that they now knew how and where to run if such an earthquake happened again. However, having *trauma* and being not afraid in case of earthquakes or living near the coast were not mutually exclusive and some people mentioned both being afraid and not being afraid anymore during the same conversation. A partial explanation could be that not being afraid anymore would be the social and moral norm; indeed many people agreed that death is predestined. This may or may not translate in a *feeling* of not being afraid anymore. Moreover, I suggest that having *trauma* is close to the grieving that is called ‘human’, which means that it can be there without excluding religious ways of coming to terms with the disaster. However, I would also like to emphasize that emotional concepts like fear (*takut*) mean different things in different contexts and may even mean different things during one and the same conversation.

The concept of *trauma* is also related to a temporal closeness of the tsunami. This is very clear in the words of Ibu Nurullah, who was one of the few who kept coming back to fear and trauma during our conversation, saying: “Until now we [*kami*] still have trauma. Until now, the year 2009, we still have trauma.” I asked her what she meant by *trauma*:

Fear! I am afraid that another earthquake will happen, that another tsunami will happen. [Then] I go and see where the children are. Where is my house? Where is my husband? I continuously remember. (...) I cannot stand sitting here alone. Then I am very quiet. If I sit here alone I think “how about this? Where will I go if it happens again, where do I run?” (...) The tsunami happened five years ago, but it is still like yesterday. I am still afraid.

Many people used the phrase “it is still like yesterday” [*masih seperti kemarin*] to translate the feeling of *trauma* or the memory of the tsunami. “Like yesterday” brings the memory very close, something present rather than past.

Women often talked about their children’s traumas. For example, Ibu Jamilah, a middle aged woman whom I often met, never told me anything about her tsunami experience. Her neighbors told me she did not want to talk about it and I never asked. However, she did tell

me extensively about her youngest son's trauma. He was only five years old when he had to run for the tsunami waves together with his older brother. When she told me about his trauma, five years later, he would be terrified when anybody even mentioned the word 'earthquake' or 'tsunami'. He was scared of being alone and started screaming when she would arrive a minute too late at his school to pick him up. If there was only a minor earthquake, he would be crying all night.

I suggest that talking about children's traumas may sometimes be easier than discussing one's own emotions, although of course this will not necessarily be so for everyone. However, as children are not yet expected to control their emotions, their traumas may be more socially acceptable. Perhaps, through them, adults can vicariously identify with that which they themselves cannot appropriately express. As we saw in chapter two and as we will see below in the section on orphans, children do take a special place in tsunami stories; as figures to express grieving as well as prefiguring uncertain, anxious or hopeful futures.

In their study of the concept of trauma, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman (2009) show how in the twentieth century the use of concept of trauma changed from denoting the sufferer's weakness to a universal way of authenticating suffering. They argue that 'trauma' has become a moral and political force that is used to select who qualifies as a victim and who does not – a qualification that has become attached to financial compensation. Their analysis focuses especially on Europe and their claim that "[t]rauma has become a major signifier of our age" (*op. cit.*: xi) may not be applicable to other parts of the world. In Aceh, having trauma was not necessary to qualify as tsunami victim and receive compensation. Yet the insights offered by Fassin and Rechtman do point to the moral force of the concept of trauma and this is particularly useful to my analysis. *Trauma* in Aceh has not only become a valuable trope for discussing different emotions attached to the tsunami experience (such as fear, sadness, a feeling that it just happened like yesterday), but it also provides a morally acceptable form of grieving as it is seen as neither a serious mental disorder nor in contradiction with Islamic piety.

### *Public grieving*

Most of the conversations about grieving from which I quoted above were personal conversations that took place in private or semi-public settings or in small groups. However, I also encountered instances of public grieving and found that the social acceptability of grieving in public was framed in religious and gendered contexts.

In the monthly neighborhood *arisan* meetings in which I regularly participated, the ten to twenty women present would start with either listening to a lecture (*cerama*) by a religious scholar (*ustadz*) or with extensive prayers. One of the first meetings that I attended took place in the house of a young woman whose parents had died during the tsunami. Her father had been a respected religious scholar. There was no *cerama* this time,

but the women, led by the chair woman – an informal position held by one of the oldest *asli* (original) women of the group – engaged in long collective prayers from their prayer book or by heart. The chair woman opened the meeting by referring to the tsunami, the parents of the host and all the other neighbors who were lost. She framed her words religiously, thanking God that the women had gathered here again and saying that they would pray for the ones who were gone. It was a short but emotional speech and during the prayers she and some of the other women were close to tears or crying, which I also noticed in several other *arisan* meetings. Grieving here was not only related to religious practices, it was expressed as part of them and, like the prayer itself, as a collective experience.

The second instance I will discuss comes from a newspaper article that appeared on the day after the commemoration ‘six years after the tsunami’ in 2010.<sup>121</sup> The author describes the situation at several mass graves:

Generally, everyone came with their family. They were reciting [*the Qur’an*], reading the *Yasin*, and praying at the [*Uleelheue, Banda Aceh*] grave that has been turned into a beautiful park. However, some of them were not strong enough to hold their tears when they were reciting and praying, especially when they saw all the photographs of victims and of the tsunami situation that were placed in this large park. An emotional atmosphere also covered the families of the tsunami victims who visited the mass grave in Gampong Siron, Kecamatan Ingin Jaya, Aceh Besar. The families of the victims came together with many compliant small children who were visibly shedding tears while their lips were continuously saying prayers (...).

From the above newspaper phrasing it may seem that showing one’s tears is something weak, as some visitors of the mass graves were not “strong enough to hold their tears.” More important for my argument, however, is that, according to this author, they started to cry while they were praying and reciting the Qur’an and while being in the presence of tsunami photographs (the importance of which will be discussed below in the section on photographs and objects). Also, the crying children at the second mass grave “were continuously saying prayers.” The religious practices are full of emotions that – here as everywhere – may be spontaneous and socially regulated at the same time (see Mahmood 2001b). Arguably, it is through religious practices that grieving can be publicly expressed. In these examples emotions are part of religion rather than being somehow “outside” it (cf. Gade 2004). Moreover, in these instances, the religious forms that grieving takes come together with the affect of Islamic practices and lifeworlds (Gade 2004, Mahmood 2005). The appropriateness of expressing grief, however, is not just the same for everybody but is strongly gendered. In Aceh, shedding tears in particular public situations and places such

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<sup>121</sup> “Isak tangis warnai enam tahun tsunami” *Serambi Indonesia*, 27 December 2010.

as the *arisan* and the mass grave is more appropriate for women than for men. Although the newspaper article is not directly specific about the gender of the mourners (although mentioning small children in particular), a series of six photographs in the same newspaper edition includes only two photographs of the mass grave: one of them shows two women crying at the mass grave, while another shows a mother and her child praying at the site. Both the text and the image can be thought of as representing as well as reinforcing gendered and religious subjectivities (Ortner 2006).

### **Remaking selves and society**

One of the aims of this chapter is to show how religious beliefs, discourses and practices are closely intertwined with remembering and grieving in Banda Aceh. This section will outline not only how people subjectively dealt with grief and loss in religious ways, but also how religion itself was changed (if only slightly) through their reflections on it and subjective remaking of it. Although I want to emphasize the crucial place of Islam in the process of grieving, it is important to note that Islamic beliefs and practices may be only one among other moral discourses and dispositions that inform this process – albeit perhaps the most influential and important one (cf. Schielke 2009a, Simon 2009). Other moral frameworks that we have encountered above include the notion of being sad as something ‘human’, ideas about *trauma* and *stres*, and the discourse on the Acehnese as particularly strong. Another influential discourse is that of ‘building back better’ through which state and international organizations promote the idea that the tsunami was a starting point from which a better Aceh would be built (see chapter five). Finally, there are of course many aspects to the broader process of remaking, including individual and psychological aspects of remaking everyday life, as discussed in the different chapters of this dissertation.

In this section I focus mainly on Islam as part of the grieving process. I want to reflect on Islamic practices within a broader context of morality, using theoretical insights into the processes through which people work on themselves (Zigon 2009a, 2009b) and discipline themselves (Mahmood 2001b, 2005). To understand the conscious effort in which people reflect on their own morality informed by their unconscious embodied moralities that they have formed in their lives up till now, I find Zigon’s theory of moral breakdown and his distinction between morality and ethics very useful. Before I turn to some examples of religious ways of grieving in Aceh, I will therefore briefly explore Zigon’s ideas on morality.

Zigon makes a distinction between morality and ethics. He conceives of morality as consisting of three interrelated and pluralistic aspects: the institutional, public discourse, and embodied dispositions. The institutional aspect concerns social organizations (like organized religions, governments, and the work place) that usually proclaim the truth of a

specific morality. The public discourse of morality is “all those public articulations of moral beliefs, conceptions, and hopes that are not *directly* articulated by an institution.” (Zigon 2009a: 259, emphasis in original). These include for example discourses in public media and everyday articulated beliefs and opinions. The third kind of morality is morality as embodied dispositions. Drawing from Mauss’s concept of *habitus*, Zigon suggests that this everyday nonconscious morality is not noticed when it is performed. It is the ability to be nonconsciously moral that “allows humans to be social beings.” (ibid: 260). But sometimes in everyday life people have to stop and reflect on their moral actions or being and this is what Zigon calls “ethics”: “Ethics, then, is a conscious acting on oneself either in isolation or with others so as to make oneself into a more morally appropriate and acceptable social person not only in the eyes of others but also for oneself.” (ibid: 261). This ethical moment of reflection is caused by a “moral breakdown” – the point at which morality is suddenly not taken for granted but reflected upon. Ethics, Zigon argues, is a regular part of everyday life and through the ethical moments people work on themselves and their embodied moralities, but also “alter the moralities of their social worlds”. Through life-long ethical reflections people continuously create their moral dispositions. They are informed by institutions and public discourses but never determined by them. Interestingly, especially for my purposes in this section, Zigon emphasizes that the newly created morality “need not entail the adoption of new moral “values” or new moral ways of being in the world” (Zigon 2009b: 98). These everyday moral breakdowns and ethics may only very subtly alter people’s morally embodied dispositions as well as public discourses and people’s moral being in the world.

I find Zigon’s theoretical framework especially valuable in the context of post-tsunami grieving for three main reasons. First of all, if we see people’s morally embodied dispositions as something they create over a lifetime, we can understand that the religious reflections on their grieving and moral selves are not just a post-disaster coping mechanism – which would be a very secular view of the ‘usefulness’ of religion. On the contrary, these reflections that Zigon calls “ethics” are informed by people’s *already* embodied moralities as well as public discourses and institutions. The religious reflections of working on the moral selves (as well as the notion of sadness being ‘human’ and thus ‘normal’) are part of the larger process of remaking one’s position in a social world in which an everydayness and thus nonconscious morality has to be continuously remade.

Secondly, I think Zigon’s notion of moral breakdowns that enable the ethical moment is an appropriate way to understand the ethical reflections people make in interview situations as well as outside of those situations. Unlike the women in the Egyptian Piety movement described by Mahmood (2005), most people whom I interviewed did not conceive of working on themselves as their major daily goal. Rather, I would suggest that the ethical reflections that came up in the interviews were a part of people’s working on

their embodied selves and reorientation in the social world that should lead to a situation in which they would not continuously think about what happened; a situation in which they could accept (*menerima*). As we saw above, many people said that they wanted to avoid thinking about the disaster, mostly by engaging in work and social activities. While saying this and reflecting on this is part of “ethics”, the need to *not continuously reflect* on and think about the disaster may be interpreted as a need return to the ‘nonconscious’ everyday.

Finally, in Zigon’s work actors always nonconsciously shift between the many aspects of morality and find their way in a plurality of moral values in any particular context, rather than only reproducing one single moral value in a specific context. The open-endedness of the moral process leaves room for incorporating the sometimes incompatible moralities of one single actor in the analysis, while still being able to understand someone’s moral actions in a situated context. This approach thus directly addresses Schielke’s concerns about the study of moral ambiguity in the everyday lives of Muslims (Schielke 2009a, 2010), but it does so by starting from the anthropological study of moralities rather than from the anthropology of Islam.

#### *Surrender and sincerity*

Ibu Rahmatan lost her husband, parents and all her four children in the tsunami. She told me how for the first time in her life after the tsunami she got a job, because she had to earn money. She was selected to go for training to Jakarta, where she had never been before. Three years after the tsunami she married and in July 2009 she gave birth to a girl. I had an interview with her four months earlier on a hot afternoon in March 2009, while her (new) husband was enlarging their small tsunami aid house with a kitchen and she was tending her kiosk in front of it. I asked her how her life was now:

Ibu Rahmatan: *Insy’Allah*, it is getting better, *Alhamdulillah*. I just think, how do I say it, my heart (*hati*, litt. liver) still remembers my children who are not there anymore, but who would I blame? I do not know who I would blame. It is not people who have done this. All of this is fate (*takdir*). So what can I say? *Insy’Allah*, I am already starting to adapt to it (*mulai dapat beradaptasi*). I do remember, how could I not remember? My children, my parents, children, even my husband, I remember them. If I see children of others, I am sad. All my four children disappeared and not even one of them could survive. But what we are saying is that that is fate. There are also families from which everybody has disappeared. *Alhamdulillah*, I was saved. And I made it up till now. (...) But I do remember. For example when it is again a year after the disaster. Or sometimes they show the waves on television. Then I strongly remember, and I strongly feel it (*terasa kali*). It was like that that day.



Annemarie: How do you deal with those memories?

R: I do not know, but it is fate. God gave this, it is his power. And perhaps we remember him at the time of the *azan* (call for prayer), I like to do *zikir* (mindfulness of God). And that is perhaps what makes it go away bit by bit (*menutupi sedikit sedikit*).

She then told me about some positive changes she experienced after the tsunami. Through her own work she has been to Jakarta for the first time in her life and she bought a motorcycle with her own money. She smiled and was clearly proud of this, showing me the brand new vehicle. But then again she said that although some things got better, she still remembered her children and thought about what they would have been like if they were still alive. She prayed for them, she did *zikir* and gave alms. When she dreamed about them, she would give alms to the poor. And she emphasized again that this was fate: "If people would have done it, we would go after them wherever they were. But God gave this. That is the thought. And I start to feel better now, *insy'Allah*." Not long after this a young man from the neighborhood joined us and said: "We think that God loved the people that have died more than he loves us..."

Ibu Rahmatan added:

He takes them sooner because he loves them, right? That is what we think. We, who are still here, do not know where we will die. (...) They [the dead] have already gone back there. They are alright there. It is a good place. We still do not know where [we will die]. And we just hope that we do not have to see the end of the earth (*kiamat*). They [who have died already] won't have to see it.

I think Ibu Rahmatan's story tells us a great deal about a personal grieving process. Her story shows the possibility of enjoying new things in life while grieving for her lost family. She draws on her religious understandings to deal with her emotions and memories and positions herself as a person whose fate it is to be still here and to experience new things. Her knowledge that God gave this disaster helps her to deal with her loss and her mindfulness of God makes the sadness 'go away bit by bit.' She speaks about a grieving process in which sadness and religious understanding go together. But there is also room for enjoying the present, for new activities.

Ibu Rahmatan's religious beliefs and practices (such as prayer, mindfulness of God, and giving alms) help her deal with her sadness and memories. These beliefs and practices are not new or individual. As moral views of the self and the position of the self in the world they have been created during her life and resonate with collective religious understandings. She spoke in the plural about her beliefs, relating them to the larger Islamic community or the Acehnese. The feeling of belonging to a collective of people with

the same experience (such as the young man who joined us) strongly influences this ethical process of reflection and thinking about one's position in the world. Many people said similar things about their religious practices, as well as about their understanding that the tsunami is given by God, that the ones who have gone are safe now, that this is fate. They are all part of what Zigon calls the "public discourse of morality". And yet, what she says here is only informed by these public discourses and institutions (like religious leaders' statements), not determined by them (Zigon 2009a). She takes particular things out of them to narrate her own subjective experience. I now turn to the narrative of another woman, Ibu Wira, who partly draws on the same moral discourses but uses them in her own way to remake her subjectivity. Different from Ibu Rahmatan, she talks about the tsunami as a lesson from which she has to learn and discipline herself to become a better Muslim.

Ibu Wira, whom I introduced in chapter two, lost her only daughter in the tsunami, while her son and husband survived and she herself was wounded. She told me how she took lessons from the tsunami and how she changed herself. It was through these lessons that she was dealing with her loss:

"Before the tsunami I had perhaps forgotten God; I did not know much about my religion (*agama*). After the tsunami, *Alhamdulillah* more than before, I want to learn a lot."

She called this process of learning *introspeksi*, explaining:

Perhaps in the past I was too arrogant towards people. Perhaps before the tsunami I felt that because I had a house everything was alright and I felt better than other people. And then suddenly God took everything away. He can take everything. (...) I now feel that it is not me who owns these things, He owns it. (...) Perhaps right after the tsunami at first I was a bit like *why Allah why* [English]? Why did my neighborhood get this disaster? Perhaps at first I was like that. Why was I so stupid not to climb on the roof? If I would have climbed up there perhaps my child would still be alive. But after some time I started reading books and listening to religious sermons. I am convinced now that it is a test for me. I understand better now that I did not own my child and my possessions. I had just been lent to me for a while (*titipan*). If God wants it, He can take it. (...) I loved this world too much and that was wrong. (...) Of course I am still sad, my tears are still flowing. But if you ask whether I am *ikhlas*, I am *ikhlas* (sincere). Although I am sad, I have to be *ikhlas*. And every day I feel better (*makin hari makin sembuh*).

She went on to tell me that she also still felt sad (*sedih*) and that she would cry if she talked with her friends. In chapter two I described how after our interview she asked me whether

there were Acehnese children in the Netherlands, implicitly suggesting the possibility of her daughter still being alive. In the interview she talked about how she dealt with the uncertainty:

I do not know where her grave is. Or if she is still alive. But if I think about that I will get crazy (*gila*), so I surrender to God (*saya pasrah sama Allah*). I am sure that my child is with God and that I will go back to God. So I am *pasrah*, I am already *ikhlas*. *Alhamdulillah*, I can already accept it (*sudah bisa menerima*).

Ibu Wira described a process in which she very consciously tried to make herself into a better person, through reading and gaining religious knowledge but also through disciplining herself in the conditions of *pasrah* (surrender) and *ikhlas* (sincerity). This process of reflection is what Zigon calls ethics. She described herself as now being in such a state that she could 'accept' it and yet she also seemed to feel that she was still in the process of working on her self, as she now understood it 'better' and she felt a bit better every day. She wanted to change her moral practices and attitudes from being arrogant and too much occupied with her possessions to being less arrogant and able to accept the loss of people and things. And she did this through cultivating the dispositions of *pasrah* and *ikhlas*.

For Ibu Wira *pasrah* was a condition, a disposition, as well as a continuing process. Much like the women in the Egyptian Piety movement described by Saba Mahmood, she had to keep disciplining herself to be *pasrah* and *ikhlas*. Like the worship rituals for the Egyptian women, in this example dispositions of *pasrah*, *ikhlas* and *bisa menerima* (ability to accept) are both an end in itself (as the norm, something that one should be) and a means to achieve this end (Mahmood 2001b). Yet cultivating these dispositions is only one dimension of the experiencing self. It does not exclude the sadness that both Ibu Rahmatan and Ibu Wira experienced and included in their narrative experience of the self. As Simon states "[m]oral selfhood comes in managing conflicting demands." (Simon 2009: 70). It is this managing of conflicting demands and multiple moral frameworks that informs the process of ethically working on oneself in the process of grieving. Rather than just creating tensions, this multiplicity may provide opportunities for navigating through different moral frameworks. In this way both the religious dispositions of sincerity and surrender and the experiences of 'sadness' and *trauma* can be part of grieving.

People frequently used the concepts of *pasrah* and *ikhlas* in our conversations about the tsunami. *Pasrah* (surrender) in this context can be described as a condition of leaving everything up to God, a condition of acceptance and letting things go, and of surrendering oneself to God. The concept was also often used in tsunami stories. For example, at the point in which people could not run any further and were about to be hit by the waves they

would tell me that they were *pasrah*; they gave up running and surrendered to God. For many people *pasrah* was also an enabling attitude. Acceptance enables going on with life and thinking about the future. 'Surrender' is then both an active position and a cultivated disposition that people draw on to remake themselves and their worlds. It is part of a process of acceptance and a way of moving towards 'not always' remembering.

*Ikhlas* is often translated as 'sincerity'. Surrender to God has to be wholehearted. Thus when Cut Marliani found out about the death of her daughter and – in her narration of this moment – cried '*ikhlas*', she urged herself to sincerely accept the death of her daughter. I have heard people use *ikhlas* in many different contexts, but the meaning of sincerity usually remains. For example, a female friend of mine did not like wearing the (mandatory) *jilbab*. If she went outside the province she would usually take it off. Once we talked about this and she told me that she was 'not yet sincere' (*belum ikhlas*). Wearing a *jilbab* without being sincere about it does not work and sincerity is a disposition that has to be cultivated through a long process.<sup>122</sup> The 'not yet' suggests a process of becoming, but also expresses the norm of what one should be.

Like Ibu Rahmatan, Ibu Wira did not put grieving and her religious, embodied understandings opposite each other. She dealt with her loss through the learning process she described, saying that she felt better every day. Working on herself to become a better person and dealing with the loss of her daughter were closely connected. It is important to realize that for both women it was not only religious practices and understandings that made them feel better. However, I do want to point out how religious discourses and embodied dispositions do influence the grieving process in important ways. Similarly, grieving influences religion and I suggest that especially in these moral breakdowns that stimulate ethical reflection (Zigon 2009a) religious subjectivities as a dimension of moral selves are remade in new ways. The way in which religion is 'lived' performatively may constitute authoritative discourses (Mahmood 2005), but as these subjectivities feed back into the social world (Biehl et al. 2007b), religion – including its discourses – is continuously made and remade.

Above, I referred to the public discourse in which the idea is articulated that Acehnese quickly dealt with the loss and pain of the disaster because of their piety – although it is only human that they are still sad (*sedih*). Although this discourse does not determine individual subjectivities, the relation between grieving as human and acceptable – even a defining characteristic of being 'human' – and dealing with grief through disciplining the self in conditions of 'surrender' and 'sincerity' is an important part of the ethical reflections

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<sup>122</sup> For an interesting discussion on recent debates among Indonesian Muslims about 'sincerity' and the relation between outer appearances and inner states see Jones (2010b).

and cultivation of moral dispositions of Ibu Rahmatan and Ibu Wira – although in different ways. Cut Marliani even said that people who would *not* be sad in this situation are the ones who ‘have lost their minds’:

Cut Marliani: We believe that there is wisdom/something good in every disaster. It is wisdom for the people who receive this disaster. The important thing is to be sincere and patient (*ikhlas dan sabar*). (...)

Annemarie: Are you sad as well?

CM: Yes of course I am still sad. There are no people who are not sad. Except for people who do not have any feelings, people who have lost their minds (*orang kehilangan akal*), people who are not sane, who cannot think normally anymore – they are not sad. But there are no sane people who are not sad. Who would not be sad after losing so many family members?

A: So you are sad but you also have to accept it?

CM: Yes, I also have to accept it. It is like I just said. We have love but God has more love. We come from Him and we will certainly go back to Him. We have to be sincere and submissive.

It is this entanglement of grieving and religious understandings that I have focused on in this section. We have seen how grieving takes the form of Islam through the concepts of surrender and sincerity, through which the women whose narratives I described here worked on their moral selves. The next section will elaborate on the relations between religion and grieving through a discussion of religious practices as responses to and part of grieving. It starts with the story of an upper middle class man who described himself and his social position as ‘fallen in the mud’ after the tsunami. He was recovering step by step and was one of many for whom prayer was an appropriate and relieving reaction to his sadness.

#### *Religious practices: prayer and kenduri*

Pak Zamzami had been part of the Acehnese elite before the tsunami. He had an influential job in the provincial government and loved his wife and children with whom he lived in a big house. Because of the tsunami he lost everything; his family, his house, and finally his job, because during the first year he was mentally not capable of handling the demanding job. He compared himself to a pearl of which the color and gleam had faded; he was in the ‘mud’ as he called it. When I interviewed him in 2008, he had ‘climbed from the mud’, step by step and, he said, slowly the pearl was starting to shine again. He had worked his way ‘up’ through different jobs, had married again and most of his big house had been reconstructed. He was reflecting on his process of recovery, when he said that he was still

sad (*sedih*): “What I remember most is the loss of my family. So when I remember the tsunami, I worship and I pray. I send prayers to my family members who are not there anymore. And with that, I feel better.”

Many people told me they prayed (*doa*) for the people they lost in the tsunami. Cut Marliani, like many others, prayed on a daily basis after her ritual worship. But she said she would also pray when she remembered her lost family, which could be at any time of the day. People prayed alone in this way but also together with others, for example in the *arisan* or during the tsunami commemoration as we saw above. Praying was also done during the tsunami. Some people told me they prayed while being in the water and many related how they prayed together with others on rooftops while seeing the water come or waiting for it to recede. Although prayer is less regulated than ritual worship, performing it – whether alone or collectively – makes the person who prays part of the Islamic community (*umma*). It is a social and learned practice and as a religious practice it is for many people an appropriate way to express grief as well as a suitable reaction to being sad and remembering. Prayer as an appropriate way of grieving and dealing with loss, moreover shapes ‘remembering’ to a form that is ‘not always’ remembering, but remembering in particular instances in a particular way. In this context, then, prayer can be seen as both ‘remembering’ and its cure. Let us return to Cut Marliani’s story to see how this worked for her:

Annemarie: When do you pray for the people who are gone?

Cut Marliani: Every time I worship, I pray (*doa*). For Muslims that is five times a day. But it is not mandatory to pray after worship. For example, sometimes we are invited to someone’s house for *wirid yasin*. We pray for the people of that house and for their family and after that we can also shift our intentions (*niatkan*) to our own family. But it does not have to be on such an occasion either. The moment we remember, we can immediately pray. Sometimes I am sitting alone and I imagine my parents or my child – that can also be when I am eating or while I am on the road – then I pray directly. ‘Make me stronger, God, I am sincere. I am already sincere. He/she is alright there. Let the new place be a better place than this world; a place that is good for him/her.’

A: Can I ask what you pray for?

CM: ‘*Ya Allah*, my God, please widen the graves of my parents (they are in the grave), illuminate their graves, widen their graves as far as my eyes can see. Let my prayer become a torch for them in their graves. Please accept the merits of their lives in this world. And let them walk over the bridge later.’<sup>123</sup> Open the door to heaven for them

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<sup>123</sup> According to Islamic doctrine, on the Day of Judgment Muslims will cross a bridge over the purgatory. Good Muslims will cross the bridge safely and enter heaven.

and let me meet again with my parents and child on the Day of Judgment. *Ya Allah*, I prayed with sincerity, please send my prayers to the people whom I indicated.'

A: How do you feel after you prayed?

CM: I feel relieved; it is as if I just met my parents. For me personally it is like that, if I pray for my parents or child it is like I have just met them again. People say that when they are gone, their soul is still in this world. They know what we are doing in this world.

I want to suggest that prayer (*doa*), not unlike religious worship (*shalat*) (Mahmood 2001b, Simon 2009) and Qur'an recitation (Gade 2004), is an embodied practice that not only repositions the person in the social world (in relation to God, the dead and the *umma*) but also changes that social world in doing so. Cut Marliani performs religious speech and practices (such as the *wirid yasin* and the particular things for which she prays) that establish her relations with God, the dead and the *umma*. As we will see below her prayers are intended to go directly to the dead to satisfy them, while also asking God to take care of them. Meanwhile, the collective prayers as well as the individual prayers as part of a collective (*umma*) remake prayer as an essential part of the grieving process and a disciplining effort to remember in a particular way.

Cut Marliani: I pray every day. After my *shalat* (worship), I pray. '*Ya Allah*, O God. Please enlarge the grave of my child, please illuminate her grave' in the grave we are in the dark 'please illuminate her grave'. According to a famous religious scholar in Aceh, the prayers of a mother for her child or of a child for the mother will not be stopped. They are immediately accepted, there is no wall. It is direct, if we pray it goes directly. If we pray for other people, perhaps those prayers will be accepted by God, but perhaps they will not arrive on the same day. But if it is for our parents or our children it goes straight away. Sometimes I remember what food she most liked in this world and she most liked *lontong*. So I make *lontong*. I make it for her and I give it to *anak yatim* (fatherless children), for example the children of Ibu Yenny (a widowed neighbor). Then it goes directly to her, because of my intentions. So if the *anak yatim* eat the *lontong*, it goes to her in the grave.

After telling me this Cut Marliani continued to tell a story she heard about someone who never gave *kenduri*, meaning that this person never prepared food for his parents in the grave, never gave it to *anak yatim*. Then, the spirit of the father came into one of the neighbors. The spirit was angry because he never received food and prayers. After his child had prayed for him and gave *kenduri* (gave food to *anak yatim*) the neighbor got better.

Cut Marliani says that prayers for parents and children will reach them immediately. Giving *kenduri* (festive meals and giving food to orphans, see below) is another way to reach out to them in the grave and keep their spirits satisfied. Prayer for parents is very important for most if not all people in Aceh I spoke with. It is especially important on Islamic holidays but also in everyday life. That the relation between the living and the dead is mutual becomes clear from Cut Marliani's story about the man who never prayed for his parents – they do receive prayers and *kenduri* and the spirits may get angry if one does not follow these practices. Prayer and *kenduri* thus have serious effects in the social world. I heard only a few stories about spirits of people who died in the tsunami acting in the social world. Most of these stories concerned people who heard spirits cry in the months after the tsunami or stories that people had heard from or about others. Cut Marliani was one of the few people who opened up with the story of her own mother's spirit who visited her and her sister. Although it may be an unusual story in the post-tsunami context, it is much less unusual in the context of Indonesian public stories about and discourses on spirits and it does open up the wider field of possible relations with the dead as well as the immediate post-tsunami question of where one's relatives are buried.

### *Dreams and spirits*

As Grayman, Good and Good (2009) confirm in their study of nightmares in Aceh, it is not uncommon for people in Aceh to be visited by spirits of the dead in their dreams. While they found that some of their informants suffered from conflict-related nightmares, none of the people I asked about dreaming and especially "bad dreams" told me they still had nightmares about the tsunami.<sup>124</sup> Interestingly, of the informants in Grayman et al.'s study who said that they dreamed about visits from people who died, a majority said that encounters were pleasant (*op cit.*: 300). Indeed, all people who told me about dream encounters with the dead recounted these as pleasant dreams. Moreover, these dreams were often interpreted as giving a message. Also, similar to Grayman et al.'s findings, in my study women were more likely to describe these dreams than men. In this section I will draw attention to encounters with spirits of the dead, whether in dreams or through spirit possession. Although the former may be more common than the latter, I argue that both, together with the practices described above, open up opportunities for relating to the dead.<sup>125</sup> I will start with a story Cut Marliani told me of a dream and a spirit possession through which she came to know the location of her mother's grave:

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<sup>124</sup> It should be noted that I started my fieldwork only three years after the tsunami. Answers may have been different if I would have asked people these questions shortly after the disaster. However, as noted above in the section on trauma, the difference in kind of 'traumatic' experiences between the tsunami and the conflict arguably does play a role here.

<sup>125</sup> In his study of Mayan dream narratives Groark (2009) shows that although people themselves may not actively influence their dreaming, paying close attention to dream talk can reveal a "more psychologically



This is the story about my mother. On the 18<sup>th</sup> day [after the tsunami] we were in Bireuen [North Aceh]. On the day of the tsunami my mother had worn a blue dress with black flowers. Somebody found her. It was difficult to contact us [in Bireuen] because it was difficult to contact anyone by mobile phone. So finally they did not know where to take the body and they gave it to the Red Cross in *Lambaro* [a village near Banda Aceh where the biggest mass grave is located]. When we came there to the mass grave [later], me, my sister, and my husband, we prayed. And that night my sister had a dream. As I said, when you pray for your parents there is no wall, it arrives straight away. When my mother was still alive and went to visit her own mother's grave, she always brought flowers. When we went there [to the mass grave] we were in a hurry, we did not have time to look for flowers; well, where would you find them anyway after the tsunami. So that night my mother came to Dahlia [Cut Marliani's younger and unmarried sister] in a dream. She said to Dahlia, 'you all just went to my place [*tempat saya*] but you did not bring flowers.' Ha! Then we were convinced that our mother was in *Lambaro*. Ha, then we were convinced, Anne.

Concerning my father, my husband once dreamed of him and he seemed to be in Sabang [on pulau Weh, a small island off the coast of Banda Aceh]. He said to my husband, 'look, all people are good here' and it was as if he was sitting on a wave. He asked my husband to take care of Dahlia. He wore the shirt that he had been wearing during the tsunami. Then he disappeared in the waves. During his life my father was really close to my husband.

She went on telling me about another connection to her mother. It happened about seven months after the tsunami, when they were living in the temporary barracks in their own neighborhood. During the day they worked in cash for work programs of NGOs and thereby helped to clean up the neighborhood. Cut Marliani said she told me this story to reinforce what they learned from Dahlia's dream.

My mother's niece from a neighboring village came by. She looked just like my mother, so if I missed my mother I would look at her. At that time she asked if she could stay that afternoon because she did not want to go home. Apparently, my mother's spirit was already in her body. So I said that of course she could stay and I took her home

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nuanced conception of the speaking subject as active moral agent." (2009: 706). Through a particular use of language in dream narratives, his informants separate the waking 'self' from the dreaming 'soul' or 'essence'. While the former is passively acted upon, the latter plays an active role in the dream – a relation that makes possible a particular negotiation of the experiencing self through dream narratives. Although further research in South-East Asia in general and Aceh in specific will have to analyze the possible relations between waking and dreaming selves, I here want to draw attention to the complexity of agency and volitional responsibility with regard to dreams and dream narratives.

with me. It started to drizzle. We cooked and then it was already 2pm and it was still drizzling outside. She slept behind me and I kept staring at her. She slept in the exact same way as my mother used to do. After lunch and after worshipping, I went inside. We had two barracks. Dahlia got one and I got another one, so we made one the living room and the other the bedroom. We slept and it was almost 2pm so we had to go to work again. And then suddenly she started to be like this [Cut Marliani shows me how her mother's niece trembled]. Apparently mama's spirit had gone into her. 'Dahlia!' [mama's spirit] called. I woke up and noticed that she was so different; she was just like my mother. She asked for a blanket because she was cold. In the water it is cold, you know, in the tsunami water. Oh, this is mama [I thought]. Her head had been on the floor and we moved her to my husband's lap. Perhaps this is mama. 'Dahlia! Come here!' I called. We approached her. She was sleeping there and I took her hand. 'Is this you, mama?' she answered yes. So her spirit had gone into her niece. 'Is this mama?' 'Yes.' 'Mama, please forgive my sins.' 'I already forgave everything, my child,' she said. It was so sad I can hardly tell this anymore. So Dahlia was there and she held Dahlia close to her. She said, 'in the end we were separated like this by God, my child. We have to accept this with our whole heart.' Before she spoke she said three times: '*La Ilaha Illallah*, I have no God but Allah.' I asked her, 'mama, where are you?' 'Lambaro' [Cut Marliani uses a trembling voice to imitate her]. She spoke like this, because she had been in the water for a long time. I asked again, 'mama, where are you?' 'I am in Lambaro Tape, I was buried there', she said. 'How about the others, ma, how about father and the others?' She did not answer, her hand was just trembling. 'How about our sister?' I just asked about our sister. 'And father, and the others, are they there?' [Cut Marliani pauses, leaves a silence]. Then she said to me, '*sudah* (alright), please take care of Dahlia, I trust her to you, take good care of her,' that is what she said. 'Ma! Dahlia cried, 'Ma! I worship [*shalat*] every day, ma, I worship five times every day, and every day I pray for you mama, do my prayers reach you?' She [the spirit] said 'every day, every day they reach me.'

This was a year and a half after the tsunami. It was on a Wednesday afternoon, with drizzling rain, at 2 o'clock. 'Alright children, I go now' she said and she slept again. (...) That is why I said that the prayers of a child for a parent always arrive.

Then Cut Marliani told me another story of a spirit that came back to tell his brother that he still had a huge debt with someone. The brother found the creditor and paid the debt.

That Cut Marliani told me this second story (about the resettling of a debt) immediately after the story of her own mother's spirit is important: her experience makes sense within a field of similar experiences of others. This similarity is what makes this experience

recognizable, and ready for both narration and interpretation. Moreover, and importantly, Dahlia's exclamation about her regular worship firmly establishes the conversation with the spirit within the range of proper Islamic practices.

Cut Marliani told me the stories about her mother's appearances as an argument for something, namely that prayers from a child for a parent and from a parent for a child arrive immediately 'without a wall'. Whereas the prayers are meant to connect to the dead and to comfort them, spirits of the dead appear in dreams or in other people (*kemasukan*) to give a message, for example to reinforce promises and to remind people of forgotten obligations. In the examples above spirits came to disclose where the grave was, to urge children to pray for them and give *kenduri*, and to settle a debt. They thus have their own agency in these stories. One could argue that the appearances of spirits in dreams and spirit possessions themselves are not actively controlled by the people experiencing and narrating them, although remembering and narrating these experiences may be part of the creation of subjectivity. However, taking seriously Cut Marliani's emphasis on the prayers and *kenduri* that reach parents and children 'without a wall', I would rather suggest that dreams and spirit possessions, like prayers and *kenduri*, open up a field of relational possibilities. Through prayers and *kenduri* the dead are in a way established as dead, they are given their proper place in relation to the living. In dreams and through spirit possessions this relation may be confirmed. Not every dead family member appears in a dream of a living family member. However, I argue that it is the possibility of this happening that is opened up by the stories – that is the active remembering and narration – about dreams and spirits that is central to the social field in which the living create their relations with the dead.<sup>126</sup> Establishing these relations, I suggest, is a very important aspect of grieving. Let me give two more examples to elaborate on this.

Pak Syarifuddin rented a small kiosk in one of the neighborhoods in which I did my research. Before the tsunami he had lived with his wife and two daughters in a house that was owned by her, running a shop owned by her family. He lost his wife and daughters in the tsunami and only found the body of one of his daughters. The wife's family took back the property and Pak Syarifuddin had to plunge into debt to buy a plot of land on which he got an aid house. He rented the wooden roadside kiosk in the neighborhood and remarried. When I first arrived in the neighborhood he was running the kiosk and had an eleven month old son. A year later, his wife gave birth to a daughter. I frequented the kiosk; hanging out and getting acquainted with the neighbors (see introduction). We got along well, but I did not talk a lot with Pak Syarifuddin. Although we talked informally about the

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<sup>126</sup> Similarly, writing about the Gayo people in the highlands of Aceh, John Bowen notes how villagers recite the *telkin* and the *tahlil* on behalf of the dead and how the dead enjoy the spiritual essence of food served on these occasions. In return the ancestors can help the living (Bowen 1993: 30).

reconstruction process on several occasions, most of what I knew about his history I learned from others. Two times he referred to his lost family. The first time he said that if he saw girls of seven to ten years old, he thought about his daughters and what they would have looked like. The second time was much later, near the end of my second fieldwork period in 2009. I stopped by the kiosk where I found him alone with his son. He then told me that he had dreamed about his eldest daughter that night. In the morning he had gone to her grave to pray.

It was all he would say about it, but I found what he said all the more significant because of his usual silence on the topic. Moreover, more people told me that they would visit the grave to pray or give *kenduri* after they had dreamed of someone who was dead. The practice of praying at the grave, as Pak Syarifuddin did, can be seen as a specific way of remembering.<sup>127</sup> A subjective practice of remembering that is situated and put in place, rather than always being there. As specific reactions on the appearance of a loved one in a dream, prayer and *kenduri* can perhaps be seen as a reply; an active positioning in remembering the dead and relating to them.

Elli, whom we met above in the section on *trauma* and *stres*, told me she often dreamed about her mother. She had started dreaming about her soon after the tsunami when she continuously imagined her mother standing in front of her in a white cloth.<sup>128</sup> She told me about some of the dreams. In one of them her mother was about to go away by car and asked her to come with her. This, Elli told me, is something you should never give in to in your dream: if a dead person asks you to come with her/him and you do this, this may mean that you will also die. In another dream she went with her mother to a huge building without a roof and without walls. Suddenly they were on the top floor looking down. Deep down below was a pool in which many of her friends who did not survive the tsunami were bathing. They were waving and one of them called 'Hey, that is Elli! She is lucky; she survived.' The water was black. Then, in her dream, her mother said: 'You do not have to bathe here' and sent her home.

When she told me about this dream in 2009 she had dreamed two more dreams about her mother earlier that week. In one dream they had been cooking together but her mother did not say anything, while in another her mother had given her money. After that, Elli had visited an elderly man in her neighborhood to ask for an explanation. He told her that it is usual that people who have died do not talk much in dreams and he explained that her mother had asked her for prayers and *kenduri*. She told him that she did not have money for *kenduri* now, but that she would try to give money to orphans (*anak yatim*) before the

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<sup>127</sup> Unlike in other parts of Indonesia, in Aceh people usually visit the grave only to pray.

<sup>128</sup> The white cloth *kafan* is wrapped around the dead body before burial.

month of Ramadan. Again, prayers and *kenduri* are not only the proper social reactions to such a dream, but also keep the dead satisfied and continue the relations with them.

In this section we saw that one way of relating to the dead is by giving food to orphans (*kenduri*). This practice in particular but also the figure of the orphan in general holds a special place in Islam as well as in the grieving process. In the following section I will look more closely at the figure of the orphan. The section starts with a song about an orphan that became very popular after the tsunami.

### ***Aneuk yatim: the figure of the orphan***

*Rafly*

*Aneuk yatim*<sup>129</sup>

Listen, I will tell a story  
A very recent story in Great Aceh [*Aceh Raya*]  
In the chaos of Aceh, east and west  
This story comes from one of these places

A child is sobbing  
At this moment, he is together with his mother  
He asks his mother, where is father now  
I miss him so much, so much, I want to see him

If he is still alive then where does he live  
I will follow [him], when I am grown up  
If he is already dead, where is his grave  
I will go there for a while, go for a while to pray

The life of mother when father is dead  
I am going to earn money, to give you rice,  
This is our fate, it is the will of Allah, of Allah  
Even if it is difficult, I will still be patient

The mother says, my child  
This is the will of Allah, for Allah we have to be patient  
Don't give up, this is a trial of Allah  
Be patient and resolute, happiness will come later

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<sup>129</sup> The song is originally in Acehnese; I translated it to English.

We already prayed to Allah  
Let the disaster not come again  
Let peace be in Aceh  
Let no more blood be shed  
And let Mekkah's verandah be strong in its religion

After the tsunami the song *Aneuk Yatim* (I: anak yatim; orphan/fatherless child) of Aceh's most popular singer, Rafly, became extremely popular in the province (and gained popularity throughout Indonesia). As can be understood from the lyrics above, the song is about a child who lost his father.<sup>130</sup> He now has to earn an income for the family and, his mother tells him, he has to accept his fate. The song was part of Rafly's solo album *Syiar & Syair Hassan Hussein*, produced in the year 2000. The orphan in the song presumably lost his father in Aceh's conflict, to which references are made both in the first and the last stanza. Moreover, the fact that the child does not know whether his father is dead and where his grave is, is telling.<sup>131</sup> However, this text also perfectly fits with the tsunami disaster, which may, together with the compellingly dramatic melody and the popularity of the singer, account for the post-tsunami popularity of the song. The (post-tsunami) video clip of the song shows many tsunami images, mostly in slow-motion. In these clips we see children in refugee camps and fathers carrying children through the water. During the first and last stanza we see Rafly singing. He is piously dressed and sits in a pious position in a *bale* (traditional community house).

There may be another reason why *Aneuk Yatim* became so popular. In the light of the topics discussed in this chapter I suggest that the figure of the fatherless child provides a very appropriate *religious* way to express grief and evoke response. Before coming back to the song and this argument, let me briefly say something about the position of fatherless children in Aceh and in Islam.

The Indonesian language knows different categories of orphans. *Anak yatim* is the child who lost its father and the *anak yatim piatu* has lost both mother and father. *Anak piatu* as the child whose mother has died is less frequently used as a category. My Acehnese friends and interlocutors explained that the reason for this is that it is the fatherless child who one should empathize with, since it is the father who is (supposed to be) the main provider of the family income. If the father dies, the family (supposedly) does not have a

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<sup>130</sup> Although the gender of the child is not directly clear from the lyrics, it can be safely assumed the child is a boy. A boy – rather than a girl – would want to follow his father (stanza 3) and would have to provide for the family (stanza 4).

<sup>131</sup> It is also significant that the song came out in the year 2000, in the midst of the political *reformasi* after the fall of President Suharto, which was the period in which the human rights violations that had been committed in Aceh over the last decade became known to the Indonesian public.

proper income and that is why on all kinds of occasions people give food to *anak yatim* (including *anak yatim piatu*). Children who still have a father but no mother, however, supposedly still have their daily needs provided through the father's income.

The fatherless child has an important position in Islam. The prophet Muhammed himself was an orphan and he urged others to be especially good to fatherless children.<sup>132</sup> Next to being economically assisted, in Aceh fatherless children should be treated very kindly in general. It is forbidden to hit them and difficult to deny any of their wishes. I often witnessed how mothers and other family members refrained from being strict in any way towards fatherless children; instead they often spoiled them. As Saya Shiraishi (1997) so vividly shows, pampering children by giving them everything they ask for is a widespread practice in parent-child relationships in Indonesia.<sup>133</sup> In attitudes towards *anak yatim* this practice is only enhanced. Instead of replacing some of the possible strictness and regulations that were set by the father, the family of the fatherless child relaxes the rules. Even extremely inappropriate behavior towards guests and others is laughed away with the argument that this behavior is caused by the absence of the father and that we should therefore just accept and understand it. In Aceh, fatherless children, especially when they are male and poor, are often sent to *dayah*, Acehese Islamic boarding schools. In other cases, the children stay with their mother or extended family. Orphans who lost both their father and mother are often either sent to *dayah* or taken care of, though not formally adopted, by their extended family, as in the case of Cut Marliani's niece Maryam.

The special place that individual fatherless children have in Aceh and in Islam extends to the general category (or figure) of the *anak yatim*. As we saw earlier in this chapter, people mentioned that after dreaming of their deceased loved ones or just thinking about them they would give food or money to *anak yatim*. They did not specify which children or where; giving something to *anak yatim* is rather about the general act and the general figure. The same reasoning applied to all kinds of parties and festivities in which food was divided. Part of it would go to *anak yatim*. Often a family that organizes a festive meal (*kenduri*) invites the *anak yatim* from the neighborhood to come before the party starts to have food and pray, especially when *kenduri* is the main reason for the party (e.g. a festive meal for a new house or a new job). But also in daily life *anak yatim* (or their mothers or families) often receive food and snacks from neighbors or the parents of their playmates. In relation to the tsunami loss and grieving, giving food to *anak yatim* for many people was the proper religious response, but also the way to deal with and give expression to grieving. As we saw above, it is also one of the ways in which the affective bond with the deceased loved ones is kept and confirmed.

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<sup>132</sup> See the chapter on *Yatim* in the Encyclopaedia of Islam (Shaham 2012).

<sup>133</sup> On Aceh, see Siegel (2000[1969]: 147).

In the context of this chapter, I want to draw attention to the *anak yatim* as a “figure” (Barker and Lindquist 2009) that may show us something about the post-tsunami grieving process. I suggest that this figure is one way to express grieving in public discourse, while at the same time being part of regular Islamic practices. Grieving and Islam converge in the figure of the *anak yatim*. Rafly’s popular song combines loss, sadness and economic hardship with religious piety and patience. Through its melody and moving tsunami images in the video clip it gives expression to sadness, rather than denying it. The song is sad and pious, the combination of which, I argue, makes the song so appealing. Through its position in Aceh and in Islam, the figure of the *anak yatim* has a special place in public discourses and subjective expressions of grieving.

### **Material memories and absences – photographs and objects**

So far, this chapter has focused on the grieving process and on how people deal with this process in different ways. We have seen how some people discipline themselves to accept their loss with sincerity (*pasrah*, *ikhlas*) and how the discursive structure of ‘strong Acehnese’ brought up a collective piety and yet left space for being sad which is as ‘human’ or ‘trauma’ also part of a collective experience. Dealing with the dead and relating to them through religious practices is an important part of this grieving process. As I pointed out in the beginning of this chapter the aspect of grieving that made the experience of grieving change over time was often formulated as a shift to a different way of remembering, as in the often used phrase ‘*ingat tapi tidak ingat terus*’ (remembering but not continuously remembering). This remembering without ‘continuously’ remembering often went together with the change towards acceptance – the difference Cut Marliani described as *sudah bisa menerima* and *belum bisa menerima* (already being able to accept and not yet being able to accept). Many people mentioned specific moments in which they would especially remember their lost family or the disaster as such. Earthquakes, for example, made many people think about the tsunami again and the earthquakes I experienced while being in Aceh always triggered a lot of talk and memories of the disaster.

Above we saw examples of other situations that made people remember, for example being alone in the house, seeing children of the same age as their own lost children, daily prayer and worship, the women’s *arisan* and the tsunami commemoration day. Many people mentioned Islamic holidays and especially *Idul Fitri* at the end of Ramadan, the yearly time of togetherness, as the moment in which they most strongly remembered the dead. We saw that what I called ‘grieving’ – a process that includes moving the self and society to a different way of remembering through remaking subjectivities and social worlds – took discursive, embodied, and material forms. I argued that in Aceh Islam is a crucial part of this process and that religious beliefs and practices are tied up with



remembering and remaking – although Islam is, as we saw, not the only form that grieving takes, nor the only institution that influences people’s ethical reflections.

The material forms of grieving include many religious practices, such as *kenduri*, worship and prayer, and visiting the grave.<sup>134</sup> As we will see in the next chapter, space is another important aspect of individual and collective remembering and forgetting. In this section I want to pay attention to photographs and objects that form another specific trigger of memory and that for many people play an important role in the grieving process, either through their presence, their absence, or the absences they bring into view (Bille et al. 2010). I do not intend to make a mutually exclusive classification of different ‘moments’ of remembering – in the process of grieving its different forms are interwoven in many ways, some of which we already encountered above. The particular materialities discussed in this section are one of these forms.

The word ‘tsunami’ was often used as an adjective to certain objects and groups of people (see chapter one). For houses, the adjective meant that the house was a post-tsunami aid house, while for objects, it usually meant that the object had ‘lived through’ the tsunami. Thus, people would talk about tsunami cars and motorcycles, tsunami televisions, tsunami clothes, tsunami chairs, and so on. Often, the use of such adjectives was followed by stories of how people cleaned the house and these objects after the disaster or invoked as an explanation for current malfunctioning of the television or the motorcycle. In some stories of people who cleaned their own houses, the recovery of these objects played an important role. In a situation in which almost everything was gone the recovery of certain plates, cups, and bedclothes became very important. Also, objects that had been handed out by aid agencies or donated by family members right after the tsunami could trigger tsunami memories.

Lost objects triggered memories as well. Absences of specific objects, such as the wedding album, sometimes would become very present when talking about the specific topic. Or people would remark upon the absence of something while seeing something similar (such as “before the tsunami I used to have a dress in exactly that color”). The phrase “everything was gone” (*habis semua*) frequently accompanied the comments on

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<sup>134</sup> Webb Keane argues that in the study of religion we should focus on religious practices and materialities rather than starting from studying inner beliefs and studying practices as evidence for these beliefs (Keane 2007). Rather than inner beliefs, he argues, it is practices that “are objects within experience to which people respond with intuitions and interpretations.” (*op. cit.*: S123). It is materiality and practices that make religion social and historical. It is exactly the relation between inner beliefs and material piety that has recently become more and more important in everyday discussions on Islam in Indonesia (Jones 2010b; for Egypt see Mahmood 2005). I would argue that it is through practices, including ethical reflections, that Islam is changed in the post-tsunami Acehese context, as much as these practices influence grieving processes and the concurrent remaking of subjectivities. In this process of continuous change materialized piety (Jones 2010b) may become even more important.

“starting from zero” (chapter one), giving expression to the absences on which reconstruction took place. As Bille et al. (2010: 4) convincingly argue, the relation between presence and absence is much more complex than being simply antonymic. Concerning materialities they argue that “what may be materially absent still influences people’s experience of the material world.” (*ibid.*). The absences of people, but also of objects, pictures, and buildings were often still very present in everyday life in Banda Aceh. Other objects that were still physically there would often invoke absences.

Thus, apart from general objects that were recovered after the tsunami some people told me about the special place of specific personal objects of the people they lost. Cut Marliani owned just one of her daughter’s former possessions: a hair-ribbon with plastic green and pink decorations that her daughter had worn on the tsunami day. Her husband took it from her hair before he buried her. When she showed it to me, she told me about her daughter’s beautiful hair. She also told me how important this object was since it proved that the girl they buried was her daughter: “It signaled that this was really our child, because most of the corpses could not be recognized anymore. With this hair-ribbon we knew it was really her, we did not doubt anymore.” She wished she would have found one of her daughter’s shirts, but they only recovered one of her husband’s. She keeps the two objects together as *kenang-kenangan*, which perhaps can be translated as personal keepsakes or as “objects that serve as metonymic reminders of an event or person.” (Strassler 2010: 204).

However, people dealt with objects and photographs in many different ways. A young man told me how he burned everything he found of his lost sister to whom he had been particularly close. He burned a shirt that had belonged to her and all the pictures of her:

I do not have to remember/think about her anymore [*nggak usah ingat lagi sama dia*]. If I remember, it is too much... On Sundays she would wash my clothes, because I was her only brother. I would often go out and she would wash them. It makes me so sad to see her [in the pictures]...

In contrast, Cut Marliani had a picture of her daughter in the middle of the room, next to the television. For her, looking at the photograph made her sadness and longing go away:

When I remember her, I sometimes go to her grave; or I look at her picture. I also have a friend who had only one child, a doctor. She put all the pictures together and burned them; she could not look at them anymore. When I look at the picture of my daughter my longing disappears. People are different.

Some people showed me how they had stored away photographs in drawers, because it was too painful to look at them. Others kept photographs in albums. Ibu Lina, who lost two children in the tsunami, showed me the album with pictures that she recovered from the mud. She said: "If I think about it too often, I will get *stres*, because I lost two children. My tears are already flowing again, I just cry, but later on my tears will disappear. And I will always look at the photographs; I will show them to you." While she pointed at the pictures of her lost children in the album, she repeatedly said that this was a *kenang kenangan* and that she was still very sad: "It is so sad... our tears have disappeared. We cannot cry anymore." [*Air mata hilang kami. Nggak sanggup lagi nangis.*].

Like Cut Marliani, Ibu Lina often looked at the photographs and considered them an important *kenang kenangan*. In contrast to Cut Marliani, however, looking at them did not make her longing and sadness go away. Instead, looking at them made her remember and made her feel sad. Yet, this particular way of remembering was also very important for her, as she would "always" look at the photographs. Although it made her sad, the memory through the *kenang kenangan* as such was not something that should go away. At least for some people, photographs of the deceased played a significant role in the grieving process by bringing back particular memories at moments that they themselves would choose.

People deal with these personal photographs and objects as well as with their absences in different ways. They are burned or stored so as to 'not always' remember and make a certain forgetting possible or kept and looked at as reminders or keepsakes to remember in specific ways at specific moments. General pictures of the tsunami and its aftermath also evoke memories of the tsunami. Some of these pictures have been shown in several exhibitions, of which the ones in the Tsunami Education Park and the Tsunami Museum (see chapter four) are permanent. Some of these pictures have iconic characteristics such as the pictures of mosques still standing in the middle of what had once been neighborhoods and villages (see chapter five). Pictures of the tsunami have circulated in newspapers, magazines and books about the tsunami, and moving images are shown on television and can be seen on several tsunami VCDs. On our first meeting, Cut Marliani, Dahlia, and Fatma showed me the pictures in a book about the tsunami. The pictures showed the destruction as well as corpses. While showing me the pictures, they repeatedly commented not only on the sadness of the situation that was represented but also on the importance of me seeing these pictures – so I would get a sense of what it had been like. The images are important for their supposedly long-lasting presence and for what they show and prove to outsiders and future generations. In that way, they are not dissimilar from the monuments and memorials discussed in chapter four. However, rather than being future and 'forgetting' oriented like the monuments (as I will argue in the next chapter), these images keep referring directly to the tsunami.

## **Narrative experiences and silences**

In this chapter we have seen many different narrative tropes through which people express the process of dealing with loss, emotions, and memories. Some examples are the concepts of *trauma* and *stres*, sincerity and surrender, accepting (*menerima*), and sadness (*sedih*). ‘Children’ play an important role in narratives about *trauma* and grieving is expressed through the figure of the orphan. A sadness that is ‘human’ is complementary to religious piety and acceptance. Phrases that people used to express grieving included: ‘it feels like yesterday’, ‘our tears have run out’, ‘I want to cry, but I cannot cry anymore’, and ‘we will never forget, but we do not continuously/always remember’. Cheryl Mattingly (2008) argues that people need cultural narratives to read each other’s minds; something that becomes evident in “border zones”, in encounters across which culture is made. “Empathy” has recently been given some new attention in anthropology as a concept crucial to cultural encounters and deserving theoretical exploration (Hollan and Throop 2008). The role of the anthropologist may be to empathize as much as possible and to try to understand the cultural narratives that Mattingly discusses. Although much attention has been paid to this role of the anthropologist, Hollan reminds us that “the empathic work of understanding” depends to a large extent on when and how people allow themselves to be understood (2008: 487). Throop and Hollan (2008) add, however, that understanding remains elusive as people’s motives are often less than conscious and conflicted. Steedly reminds us of the politics of storytelling and the limits of narrative possibility these politics create (1993: 30). These limits may also be created along lines of class, age, and gender. Post-traumatic stress disorder can make narration impossible. Moreover, the political power of the spoken word may leave it unspoken (Spyer 2000b). Language and the possibility of speech genres in a particular society are themselves crucial for the possibilities of representation, while at the same time shaping the experience of social suffering (Kleinman et al. 1997: xiiv-xiv). Similar to Steedly, Kleinman et al. emphasize that this does not mean that there is no experience without language or narration: “(...) while experience is shaped by representations, it can also push against these representations – resisting language, bending it in new directions, and distorting the received ways of expressing distress and desperation so that these distortions themselves transform the experience of suffering.” (*ibid.*).

The examples of narrative tropes that I presented at the beginning of this section, however, are important to ‘being understood’. Experience is created through them and they show us one aspect of how the social world (here through language) informs subjective experience and how this experience feeds back into the social world. It is these tropes, but more importantly the contexts and stories in which people use them, that create what Steedly calls ‘narrative experience’: “a tricky space where lives are told and stories lived.” (1993: 15). Here, at the end of this chapter, however, I want to return to silences. My reflection on silences in the intersubjective encounter – and especially the rarer moments

in which people explicitly give instructions on how to understand their narratives and silences – is meant to engage with the question of the limits of ethnographic understanding and thereby shed light on the messy process of understanding and narrating ‘grieving’. As outlined in the introduction of this chapter, subjectivity (Good 2004) and narrative (Beatty 2010) have recently been posited as viable alternatives for cultural relativist and universalistic approaches to the study of emotions and – in the case discussed here – to understanding ‘grieving’. Here, I will again use both the narrative approach and the notion of subjectivity to understand that which is “unspeakable and unspoken” (Good 2012: 24) or even unthinkable (Spyer 2010).

Before giving a few examples of ‘silences’ and people’s comments about them, I want to comment on two important issues. First of all, we should watch out for supposing that trauma, emotions or even memory ‘have to be there’. However, my intention here is not to ask why some people ‘do not speak’ about emotions or memories, supposing that they do ‘have’ them. Rather, I want to suggest how some comments, gestures, or plain absences show us the limits of what is narrated and what can be interpreted. This, as Good (2012) points out, may be a process of mutual discovery instead of the anthropologist “knowing better” than people with whom he or she works.

Secondly, there is the question of why we need to know and why we would interrogate silences at all. Certainly, there is an ethics of ‘not knowing’ and therefore one of ‘not asking’ – an example of which I will provide at the end of this section. Silences may be defenses and people may not talk simply because they do not want to. Moreover, perhaps even more than spoken words, silences run the risk of being misinterpreted. Would someone not speak about his or her grieving because it is too painful? Out of fear of starting to cry? Because he or she thinks that it is not interesting for the research? Because it is normative not to discuss emotions? Or because it is not a crucial issue (anymore)? There may be plenty of other reasons. Rather than interpreting moments that I took for silences, below I will discuss the case of a man who commented on his own silence. Creating room for asking how these processes work does not necessitate interpretation. So without interpreting all possible silences, in this section I at least want to point at the possibility of silences being as much a part of grieving as narrative expressions. Finally there is, of course, an ethics of not-writing as well, but as Spyer suggests, “[i]f writing is a kind of violence, not writing and varieties of not-writing occasionally risk being so, too.” (2006a: 162).

I have been surprised by the apparent ease with which people in Aceh used to talk about topics related to the tsunami. It was not uncommon for friends and neighbors to introduce me to others with phrases such as “this woman lost two children so it will be interesting for you to interview her” after which the person just introduced would indeed start talking

about the disaster or tell her personal story. The straightforward ways in which friends like Cut Marliani, but also people who had been strangers to me minutes before told me about their loss and their grieving, made the not-talking of some people I met regularly more apparent. Some people who did talk about the tsunami remarked that they had not been able to talk about it for some years after the disaster and they saw the change as an improvement. Sometimes they commented on other people's ability to talk about it, not unlike the way in which Cut Marliani spoke about the ability of people to 'accept' (*menerima*). For example, one day I interviewed one of my neighbors, Ibu Hasanah, who had lost a daughter and grandchild in the tsunami. Other neighbors, all women who I had come to know fairly well by then, were present and now and then joined in the conversation. Throughout the interview Ibu Hasanah kept saying how sad (*sedih*) she was and that the tsunami still felt like yesterday. At some points in our conversation she was crying or almost crying, but that did not keep her from elaborately telling her story of the tsunami and following days and weeks. When talking about her sadness one of the other women, Ibu Illiza, repeatedly added comforting remarks, saying for example that we all go back to God and that her child and grandchild were waiting for her in heaven (*menunggu di surga*). At the end of the interview she remarked that Ibu Hasanah did not talk about all this before:

Ibu Illiza: This woman only recently opened up, before that she did not talk [about this] (*suka diam*).

Annemarie: Didn't you want to talk about it, or could you not talk about it?

Ibu Hasanah: I could not talk about it (*nggak sanggup cerita*).

Annemarie: So it is only since recently that you do...

Ibu Hasanah: It is like yesterday, Anne, this is already three years.

Annemarie: Very close...

Ibu Hasanah: O, I am still very close [to the tsunami] (*masih dekat sekali*)

'Opening up' and moving from a state of not talking (*diam*) to talking about the disaster was seen as progress; one change in the process that I describe as 'grieving'. The women in this conversation, who would usually spend the late afternoons chatting together, played a role in this 'talking about' the disaster. It is important to notice that one of them, who was not present on this particular day, (still) did not talk about it. She was – at least in my presence – never probed into a conversation about the tsunami.

In this chapter we have seen how some words signal one's position in this process, examples of which are *sudah* (already) and *belum* (not yet). People speak about already or not yet being able to surrender, to be sincere, or to accept. Another such word is *masih* (still). It is often used together with trauma (as in 'everyone here still has trauma'). Ibu

Hasanah emphasized in this conversation that although the tsunami happened three years ago, it still felt like yesterday; it felt very close or recent. I would say that 'still' being close to the tsunami (like yesterday) offers the possibility of in the future moving this feeling through time – although 'physical' time has already passed. Like discussing being able to talk after having been silent, saying that one is 'still' close to the tsunami and that it feels like it happened yesterday are at the same time comments on grieving and turn grieving into a process of change.

Elsewhere in this chapter we encountered some people whose silences I cannot and do not want to interpret, but whose narratives – when they did talk about the tsunami – became therefore perhaps even more significant. Ibu Jamilah, for example, whom I often met but who never talked about the tsunami, until she told me extensively about her son's trauma. During that conversation I tried to ask about the tsunami several times but she kept returning to her son's experience without spending a word on that of her own. I also mentioned Pak Syarifuddin who hardly ever talked about the disaster until one time he spontaneously told me he had dreamed about his daughter and visited her grave. Let me now turn to Pak Nazaruddin, who was one of the few to comment on his own 'silence' earlier in our conversation.

One afternoon in March 2009 I was introduced to Pak Nazaruddin, a man in his early forties. He owned a small grocery store at the side of the road. He was very willing to talk about the tsunami. He told me that although he came from Banda Aceh, he was not in the area during the disaster, because he used to live in Jakarta with his wife and children. Soon after the tsunami he came back to Banda Aceh to look for his parents and extended family members. His father's body was found, but buried before he even arrived in Aceh. Pak Nazaruddin spoke easily about a range of things: he told me about the post-tsunami reconstruction process, about the economy, about corruption. He spoke extensively about religion, about how we had to accept the tsunami as the will of God. He voiced the idea that because of their piety the Acehnese did not go crazy after the tsunami. Quite early in the conversation, when he was telling me about his return to Aceh to look for his parents, I asked him what it looked like here at the time. He avoided my question and kept on telling about his life in Jakarta after which we talked about corruption, the economy, politics, and education in Aceh. About forty minutes later I asked him if he often thought about the tsunami and his parents. He replied: "Yes. Earlier on [in the conversation], I felt like crying, so I did not say anything. I just changed the topic" (*buang ke lain*). Later he stressed again that he had deliberately changed the topic earlier on.

Although women would sometimes cry during interviews, men never did. Pak Nazaruddin not only commented on the moment he changed the topic, but also said that this was because he felt like crying. It is probable that more men (but also women) have

avoided the topics for this reason. Although these silences may be difficult to point out and often impossible to interpret, it is important to be aware of them as they do show the limits of narrative possibility (Steadly 1993); limits that are certainly gendered in this case. It also shows the limits of what we can and, perhaps, should want to know. It is with this in mind that I turn to a final example of an experience with Cut Marliani.

I had known Cut Marliani for years when one afternoon we talked about graves. We talked about mass graves, but also about her daughter's grave. Somewhat surprised she wondered why she had never taken me with her to that grave which was not far from her house anyway and we agreed that the next morning we would visit her daughter's grave as well as the mass grave. The next morning we went off by motorcycle. I was driving and she gave me directions to the mass grave, after which we visited one of her friends who lived in a tsunami relocation village nearby. By then, it was becoming increasingly hot in this area with hardly any trees and Cut Marliani suggested that we should just go home. She never said anything about her daughter's grave anymore and I did not ask about it.

Narrative is important to knowing and understanding each other. Its limits also firmly suggest that we cannot know and understand others completely. What we can try to do and what I have tried to do in this chapter, however, is to incorporate these limits in writing.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how narratives and embodied practices shape 'remembering' and 'not always remembering'. I pointed out the cultural means through which grieving practices are mediated as well as the subjective ways of dealing with loss, memory and emotions. Islam is an important dimension of both these cultural means and their subjective expressions. I have studied the process of grieving by exploring fields of subjectivity in which the social and individual come together without being reduced to either the one or the other. Finally, I explored the narrative experiences – the 'tropes' and contexts in which and through which grieving is expressed and narrated. Embodied and narrated experiences of *trauma* and *stres*, religious dispositions, practices and figures, and materialities and their absences discussed in this chapter all point to the way in which the social world shapes experience and narration. Yet the differences in stories and experiences, in ways of dealing with keepsake objects and in drawing on and reworking religious discourses and understandings, suggest how people subjectively navigate through the social world and remake it on their way. These processes are not alien to everyday life. But I suggest that in the process of post-disaster remaking – and particularly what I call 'grieving' here – they become imperative. Subjectivity as becoming (Biehl and Locke 2010) becomes even more pressing in the post-disaster context. As we have seen in this chapter dealing with the past is a crucial aspect of 'becoming' and it is through subjectivity that different ways of organizing memory take shape in Banda Aceh. It is through the process of



grieving in a way that means 'not always' remembering that people remake their subjectivities in the long aftermath of the tsunami.