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

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## Chapter four

### The re-emerging city: remembering and forgetting through urban space

#### Introduction

The tsunami swept away large parts of Banda Aceh's built environment, leaving flattened landscapes full of debris and dead bodies. In many places, former roads could not be distinguished from former buildings anymore, and mosques were often the only structures that had withstood the waves. Trees and electricity poles had tumbled and crushed buildings; large and small boats remained stuck on houses or in the debris when the water receded. Recalling the crushed cityscape, people mentioned that it was flat (*rata*), quiet (*sepi*) and, at night, shrouded in total darkness – a dead city, or a ghost city, some people called it. Survivors wanted to go to their neighborhoods to search for family members immediately after the tsunami, but in many places it was hardly possible to move through the debris and to locate former houses. This was the ghastly landscape through which Pak Faisal moved on the second day after the tsunami, looking for his family members, like so many others. The middle aged fishmonger, who lost his wife and the youngest of his five children, told me the following about that day:

We could not go into the neighborhood immediately after the tsunami. We could only enter it on the following day, on Monday. We needed a cane to walk. Walking was difficult; it took us an hour to walk the small distance from the crossing to our house. We moved very slowly, because the roads were full of debris, rubbish from the buildings, pieces of broken glass, barbed wire. I found my daughter on top of the mosque. She was trapped on the second floor. I took her from there; she was still alive. When we saw her, we initially thought she was dead.

Mosques still standing in the leveled landscapes not only became a safe haven for Pak Faisal's daughter and many others, but they also came to symbolize the force of the tsunami. Many people saw the survival of the mosques as a sign that the tsunami had been given by God (see chapter five). Ships that were forced inland by the waves to end up in the middle of the city also saved dozens of people. Perhaps the most famous of these ships was *PLTD Apung*, a huge ship that had served as an electricity plant and that ended up in one of the worst hit neighborhoods. While the enormous operation of cleaning up Banda Aceh in the months after the tsunami involved taking away most of the other ships, *PLTD Apung* was too large to demolish or to move back to the sea. It became an attraction, for visitors as well as residents of Banda Aceh, showing the astounding force of the tsunami. In the years

after the tsunami, the city re-emerged around the ships and the pre-tsunami structures that resisted the waves. In the process, the authorities designated *PLTD Apung* and one other ship, a mass grave, and the recently constructed Tsunami Museum as official ‘tsunami tourist places’.

In this chapter I focus on processes of forgetting and remembering the tsunami in urban space. I concentrate specifically on the tsunami ‘tourist places’, or monuments, and show how they gain meaning in urban space as they keep bringing to mind the tsunami and as people attribute a lasting presence to them. As they are intended to survive individual lives, they speak to the widely felt need to remember the tsunami in the future. Urban space is an important arena for collective remembering and forgetting. I suggest that while collective memory is clustered, brought together, in certain places – or *lieux de mémoire* as Nora (1989) has called them –, everyday space does not continually evoke memories of the disaster. Although no place in the city is historically empty and people use many spatial references when speaking of the tsunami, the remaking of everyday life necessitates that the disaster is not always and everywhere visibly present in public space. In the end, that which gives some places (like monuments) their symbolic force is their difference from the rest of public space. By focusing on the interfaces between the clustering, or bringing together, of collective memory in certain places and the process of spatial forgetting in others, I will show how the temporalities of the pre-tsunami past, the present everyday and the need to remember in the future become part of “embodied” urban spaces (Low 2009, see below).

However, the tsunami memorial places acquired their meanings not only in relation to the reconstruction of the rest of the city and through their specific material characteristics, but also through the politics of their production. The politics involved in the establishment and promotion of these places include, for example, the problematic case of some survivors who could not return to their land because it was taken by the *PLTD Apung* ship. But these politics also include the different ways in which BRR and the municipal government used the tsunami tourist places to promote a better future for Aceh and to market the city of Banda Aceh as a destination for domestic and foreign tourists. These images of the future based on the tsunami monuments not only seem to bring closure to the past, but also overlook past problems and grievances. Most strikingly, the recent separatist conflict has not yet been officially memorialized in urban space. I suggest therefore that, apart from their many other meanings, the tsunami monuments keep the conflict out of view in a way that is politically convenient for both the national government that seeks to restore its authority and regain its legitimacy by focusing on the future and the municipal government that attempts to promote Banda Aceh as a peaceful tourist destination. However, before discussing the tsunami memory places, in the following section I will first introduce the way in which I approach the topic of collective memory in urban space.

### *Collective memory in urban space*

Remembering, as we have seen in the previous chapters, takes place in the present and although every individual has personal experience and thus embodied memories, the process of remembering is at the same time socially framed. Maurice Halbwachs, whose ideas were strongly influenced by Durkheim, was one of the first to articulate these insights in his seminal work *les Cadres Sociaux de la Mémoire* (1952 [1925]), arguing that “it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these [social] frameworks [of memory] and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection.” (Halbwachs 1992: 38).<sup>135</sup> He is credited with coining the term collective memory.<sup>136</sup> Though showing how people remember through social frames, through identification with social groups, Halbwachs hardly paid attention to the relation between the individual who remembers in a socially framed way and public instances of collective remembering, such as monuments and commemoration (Olick 1999). This relation, however, has been theorized by other scholars who have, especially over the last decades, contributed to the broad field of memory studies. Aleida Assmann, who together with Jan Assmann theorized the concept of ‘cultural memory’, for example, explains that individual embodied memory cannot be embodied by another person, but it can be shared (Assmann 2008: 50). This sharing in narratives or images becomes part of an “intersubjective symbolic system” (*ibid.*). At the same, through participation in certain groups a person learns to draw on symbolic systems and through practices affectively identifies with collective memories (*op. cit.*: 52). Collective remembering is thus an affective and intersubjective process.<sup>137</sup> Crucially, the collective memory of a social group is created through a process of selection and is always mediated (*op. cit.*: 55). In his often quoted work on the ways in which the nation (as one social group) remembers, Pierre Nora (1989) shows how this mediation of collective memory is embodied in certain sites which he called *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory. Such a site is not necessarily spatial: the practice of prayer and the *Aneuk Yatim* song that we encountered in the previous chapter could also be called sites of memory. However, there are several reasons to focus on monuments and memorials as specific, spatial, sites of memory in Banda Aceh.

Importantly, people in Banda Aceh made the meaning of these places clear to me in many personal conversations. As we will see below, people often spoke of *PLTD Apung* as a

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<sup>135</sup> Halbwachs had a ‘presentist’ approach and therefore paid little attention to continuity of collective memories (Coser 1992). Later scholars emphasized that this continuity, however partial, is as indispensable to collective memory as the notion that it is made in the present (*ibid.*).

<sup>136</sup> Olick et al. (2011) point out that Halbwachs was neither the first nor the only scholar in his time to develop such ideas about memory. Yet, it is his work that has been taken up broadly and has become especially influential in the field of memory studies since the 1980s.

<sup>137</sup> In the same article Aleida Assmann looks at the relation between collective memory and history, arguing that “[c]ollective memory (...) depends on transitions from history into memory that involve the framing of historical events in the shape of affectively charged narratives and mobilizing symbols.” (Assmann 2008: 67).

site where one could see the force of the tsunami. Mass graves were sites where people went to pray for the dead. These memory places played an important role in the municipality's urban planning strategy, especially in the context of tourism and the branding of the city. The materiality of public monuments and memorials sets them apart from most other sites of memory. Their materiality and therefore supposedly long-lasting presence "make[s] us believe in the permanence of identity" and makes them a "means of fixing history" (Rowlands and Tilley 2006: 500). They can therefore play a significant role in the creation of collective meaning, memory and identity (Johnson 2002).<sup>138</sup> In the post-disaster city, monuments, memorials and other symbols can "constitute a key element of urban resilience", because they are "visible signs of progress" (Vale and Campanella 2005: 344). As we will see in this chapter, the Tsunami Museum could be interpreted as such a sign. As signs of progress and resilience, sites of memory are directed towards the future as much as they selectively make memory of the past. This selection of the ways in which memory is mediated is at least partly a political process. To understand the existence of memorials and monuments it is therefore necessary to study the politics of their production (Duncan 2009, Rose-Redwood et al. 2008, Simpson and Corbridge 2006, Simpson and de Alwis 2008).<sup>139</sup> In short, the politics of their construction and selection as well as the ways in which urban residents engage with them make the memorial places in Banda Aceh interesting sites for exploring the ways in which collective memory is made.

Forgetting, or 'not always remembering' as we saw in chapter three, is a similarly crucial part of remaking everyday life. Thus, while recent studies of memory in urban space have shown a growing attention to memorializing (Huyssen 2003, Kusno 2010, Till 2005), they have also pointed to the necessity of forgetting (Forty 1999, Kusno 2010). To understand the different meanings of monuments and create a better understanding of spatial remembering and forgetting, it is therefore not sufficient to trace only the politics of the production of monuments. Rather, it is also important to take into account the rest of urban space in which these monuments stand. Therefore, to understand the role of urban space and memory places in the remaking of post-tsunami everyday life, I will look explicitly at the interfaces between remembering and forgetting as these are realized in public urban space.

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<sup>138</sup> Not all monuments have the same symbolic power and some monuments are even totally ignored. In Aceh, for example, a Japanese organization erected dozens of columns in different public places that have the exact height of the tsunami water in that place. In the many conversations I had about memorials and monuments, people hardly ever mentioned the columns. Similarly, in her study of a tsunami hit village in Tamil Nadu, Hastrup describes a tsunami monument that was completely ignored by the local population (Hastrup 2010).

<sup>139</sup> Many scholars have pointed out that states use monuments to express the current political situation, also in Indonesia. For one elaborate account, see the study of the Indonesian National Monument (Monas) by Katherine McGregor (2003).

To study these interfaces, it is important to know how urban space is created and experienced. People produce urban space in many ways; through planning, design and physical construction, but also through everyday use and the meanings and memories that they attach to it (Hebbert 2005, Low 2009). By now classical studies of the creation of urban space include the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), who explored how space is produced through everyday uses and movements, and that of Henri Lefebvre (1991), who showed how “people experience as well as constitute space” (Low 2009: 30). Setha Low (2009: 22-23) has pointed out that the body and bodily practices are important in both of these theoretical perspectives. She proposes to look at “embodied space” as a useful addition to the analysis of the social construction and social production of space (Low 2009, 2011). Embodied space, she argues, is “the location where human experience and consciousness takes on material and spatial form.” Therefore, the concept “offers a useful framework for understanding the creation of place through spatial orientation and movement.” (Low 2009: 28). Furthermore, language and specifically what people say about embodied space is indispensable to our understanding of social space. Low concludes that “[s]ocial relationships are the basis of social space, yet these relationships necessitate materiality, in the form of embodied space and language, to work as a medium of discussion or analytic device.” (*op. cit.*: 34). This approach to studying social space fits rather well with the ethnography of subjectivity that I argue is a productive way of gaining insight into the processes of post-disaster remaking. Embodied space can then be a valuable concept which helps to foreground the ways in which people affectively experience and create social space, in a material way and through social relationships. Even though this chapter focuses on relatively ‘fixed’ monuments more than on the movements of people, it does explore how these material forms mediate the social relationships that form collective memory. It is, with the politics of the production and construction of places, especially the affective dimension of embodied space that I will highlight in the following sections.

Before turning to the tsunami memory places, in the following section I will give some examples of the ways in which places evoke memories of the disaster and of the ways in which movement itself creates embodied space. Subsequently, I will discuss the official tsunami monuments, including the Tsunami Museum, and draw attention to the way in which the Banda Aceh municipality uses them in tourism campaigns. Towards the end of the chapter I will look at some unofficial, and possibly temporary, monuments by analyzing how graffiti inscriptions ‘monumentalized’ some walls of still standing houses. In the concluding section I return to the ‘place’ of tsunami memory places in the re-emerging city by reflecting on the play of remembering and forgetting in urban space.

### **The re-emerging city**

On my fourth day in Aceh in October 2007 I accompanied my host parents to the neighborhood leader (*kepala dusun*) to report my presence in the neighborhood. We went after the sunset prayers, when it was already dark and the streets quiet. After our visit we took a walk through the neighborhood during which my host mother pointed out different places. She commented on nearly every house we passed, often in brief phrases: “from this family, four children are gone”, “here, the mother and two children”, “here, only the two children who studied in Yogyakarta survived”, “from this family, the mother is gone, she was a friend of mine”, “this man found his wife’s dead body inside the ruins. He buried her in front of the house.” The different places were irrevocably connected to the people who died or went missing. A few days later, a young man showed me around the adjacent neighborhood. He also commented on the space, pointing at a volleyball field in which a new net had just been hung. Before the tsunami it was always crowded, he said, now there is no one here.

In conversations, at home or on the road, people often commented on the present and the past of places in the city. When passing or seeing such a place they would tell me about the people who had lived there, about houses that had been built on previously empty land, trees that were gone, roads that had recently been asphalted, former soccer fields and new cafés. People pointed out rooftops on which many people had been saved during the tsunami and places where corpses had been gathered. Places, de Certeau argues, “are like presences of diverse absences”. And a history of displacements creates the “invisible identities of the visible” (1984: 108). The visible as well as its invisible identities together influence the remaking of everyday life. The examples above show “embodied spaces” in which people make social space not only through movements, but also through imaginings, thoughts and experiences (Low 2009). In embodied space the former houses of the dead become the “material and spatial form” in which experience is located.

The city also emerges through practices. De Certeau (1984) has shown how people produce urban space through their practices. They do so in a different way than urban planners and architects produce space; urban dwellers produce space by consuming it – which is what de Certeau called “consumer production” (1984: xii). This kind of production cannot appear on a map. On a map, we can draw the trajectories that people take, but we cannot show how long it takes them or how they feel when they move through the city. The map does not show where they stop and linger, where they buy the newspaper or the best coffee in town. It is this part of urban life that cannot be made visible on a map; that cannot be produced by urban planners, but only by the movements, experiences and memories of consumer production.

Many people in Banda Aceh commented on the new or renewed practices of making the city. They pointed out how the city had become more and more crowded, that there



were many more motorcycles and cars than before. They often told me how during the conflict they could not go out at night. After the tsunami many people enjoyed visiting friends, shopping, going to cafés or restaurants, or just driving around (*jalan jalan*) in the evenings. Roads that could not be taken then were safe now. The official tsunami tourist places that I discuss below became one possible recreational destination. Almost everyone I spoke with had seen the *PLTD Apung* ship at least once. In January 2012 I saw that the Tsunami Museum drew many local visitors. Even during my 2009 fieldwork when it was still closed people tried to visit the museum and, upon finding out that it was closed, lingered at the site for a while. Some people told me how on Islamic holidays or on the tsunami anniversary they would make a tour to visit several tsunami sites, especially mass graves, where they would pray for the dead. As I will elaborate below, this was one of the interactive and affective aspects that made these places part of collective memory. On regular days, the mass graves were usually deserted. Yet, even when they did not visit the tsunami tourist places, many people would point out their importance. These sites, they said, were not only important to the survivors, but also to those who did not experience the disaster. They showed the tsunami's devastation to outsiders and future generations.

### **Tsunami monuments and memory places**

In this section I will take a close look at the tsunami monuments and memory places in Banda Aceh. I will draw attention to their discursive power as 'authentic monuments' and 'proof' of the tsunami through which they appear as a "means of fixing history" (Rowlands and Tilley 2006: 500). I will look at their affective dimensions through which they become symbolic carriers of collective memory. And finally, I will explore the politics of their making and ask how a monument is 'singled out' from everyday urban space. Importantly, not all monuments are singled out; they may also be ignored. However, the tsunami memory places that I discuss in this section all acquired a particular 'place' in the urban collective memory – something which became clear from the municipal attention to these sites as well as from people's visits to the monuments and their stories about them. Before I turn to the places that are primarily associated with the tsunami, let me first mention three religious landmarks that were affected by the disaster and gained new meanings through it.

The Great Mosque *Baiturrahman* is probably the most important urban landmark for Banda Aceh's residents. First built in Aceh's Golden Age in the seventeenth century, burned to the ground by the Dutch to be subsequently rebuilt by the colonial regime and expanded later in the twentieth century (see Raap 1994), the mosque brings together Acehnese identity and Islamic piety and it evokes the ability of the region to survive. Together with the *Baiturrahim* mosque near the *Uleelheue* harbor and the grave of *Syiah*

*Kuala*,<sup>140</sup> it moreover fits perfectly in the post-tsunami municipal marketing strategy that aims to promote Islamic tourism next to other forms of thematic tourism (see below). All three places were affected by the tsunami and gained new symbolic meanings. The *Uleelheue* mosque was one of the only buildings left standing among the rubbish, which many people interpreted as proof that the tsunami was given by God. The *Syiah Kuala* grave was severely damaged but not totally destroyed. Finally, the *Baiturrahman* mosque became a safe place where many people survived the disaster. Miraculous stories of how God lifted people to the roof strengthened its symbolic power afterwards. However, although they acquired new meanings because of the tsunami, both the mosques and the grave were already important historical and religious symbols before the disaster. Therefore, when I asked people about tsunami places (*tempat wisata tsunami*), they mainly mentioned places that emerged as a consequence of the tsunami, such as the *PLTD Apung* ship (commonly referred to as *Kapal Apung*).<sup>141</sup>

#### *Monumental ships: proof, authenticity, and affect*

Banda Aceh's municipality has turned two ships that ended up in urban neighborhoods into official tsunami monuments. The first and most famous is the one that I referred to in the introduction of this chapter, *PLTD Apung*. The enormous ship that ended up in the neighborhood of *Punge Blang Cut*, several kilometers away from the coast, had been an offshore electricity plant before the tsunami.<sup>142</sup> In the first years after the disaster it was still uncertain what would happen to the ship. In 2007 steps were taken to build a memorial park adjacent to the ship, although buying out this area's residents, who had already moved into their newly built homes in this spot, did not go without protests.<sup>143</sup> In the following year, the 'Tsunami Education Park',<sup>144</sup> donated by BMW Indonesia and the *Mitra Mandiri* foundation, was constructed and economic activity in the area began to grow.<sup>145</sup> Meanwhile, the *Punge Blang Cut* youth organization (*pemuda kampung*) claimed the right to operate the site, including maintaining the ship and managing paid parking and sales activities in the area.<sup>146</sup> The education park has a small but permanent photo exhibition and

<sup>140</sup> This is the grave of *Syeikh Abdurrauf Singkil* (*Abd al-Ra'uf b. Ali al-Fansuri al-Singkili*), a famous Islamic scholar from the seventeenth century. He is also widely known as *Teungku Syiah Kuala* and the grave is usually referred to as the *Syiah Kuala* grave.

<sup>141</sup> See also Van Leeuwen (2011) on the symbolic importance of the ship and several other sites in Banda Aceh.

<sup>142</sup> See picture 3.

<sup>143</sup> See for example 'Gubernur tanggapi keluhan warga di lokasi PLTD Apung,' *Serambi Indonesia*, 31 October 2007.

<sup>144</sup> See picture 4.

<sup>145</sup> Banda Aceh's deputy mayor mentioned that increased economic activity was one of the intended results of the creation of the park and the monument, see 'Tahun ini, Taman Edukasi Tsunami dirampungkan,' *Harian Aceh*, 11 March 2008.

<sup>146</sup> 'Pemuda Punge menuntut pengelolaan PLTD Apung,' *Serambi Indonesia*, 25 February 2008.

has been used for leisure or community activities over the last few years. Both Banda Aceh's residents and visitors from outside the city kept coming to the site to see the ship and climb to its upper deck. In 2009 I saw that many visitors had left their names or another written message on the ship's smokestacks, but in 2010 I noticed that they had all been painted over. Upon my questioning, one of the site's facilitators told me that everything on the ship was 'authentic' (*asli*). That was why the inscriptions that, as he told me, had been made by 'bad' (*jahat*) 'village people' (*orang kampung*)<sup>147</sup> had to be painted over. In a few years time, the ship had been turned into an official monument that should remain 'authentic'.

Many tsunami survivors I spoke with referred to *PLTD Apung* as proof (*bukti*) of the tsunami. They thought it would be important to maintain the ship as a monument that shows the force of the tsunami. Visitors could see proof of the disaster in this place, but, people often emphasized, it would be especially important to preserve the ship for future generations (*anak cucu*) to understand and learn about the tsunami. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, the idea of 'proof' in remembering through material presences and absences plays a role in other sites of memory as well. Karen Strassler (2004) has pointed out how in Indonesia during the *reformasi* after the fall of Suharto, the notion of proof (*bukti*) became the central term of a politics of visibility and transparency. Only with visible proof could an event become history. I suggest that this concern with proof and visibility in the context of what people want to 'remember in the future' (Huyssen 2003: 29) plays a significant role in the way in which people talk about tsunami memory places.<sup>148</sup> Below, I will return to this relation between remembering in highly specific ways and visibility and discuss its consequences for invisibility and forgetting. Let me discuss one more dimension of *PLTD Apung*'s symbolic power, which is the way in which people regard it as an 'authentic monument' (*monument asli*).<sup>149</sup> It is 'authentic' because its emplacement was directly caused by the disaster. Many people told me that the ship shows the force of the tsunami and therefore God's power. Its symbolic meaning is therefore established iconically and indexically, both through its physical presence and its discursive elements.

<sup>147</sup> The site facilitator told me to look at the carvings that were still visible in the surfaces, arguing that those were *kampung* writings.

<sup>148</sup> In the specific context of the temporality of monuments, Benedict Anderson has remarked that monuments "face two ways in time", since they commemorate events of the past but are intended "for posterity." Thus, "monuments are really ways of mediating between particular types of pasts and futures." (Anderson 1990: 174).

<sup>149</sup> A *monumen asli* could be translated as an 'authentic monument'. But as several scholars have shown, in recent decades *asli* has acquired a much broader and more powerful meaning (see for example Pemberton 1994b, Strassler 2010). The New Order regime fetishized the *asli* in its attempt to order and standardize timeless and authentic 'culture' (Pemberton 1994b) as well as to order people through the ever present need to present authentic documents to prove one's identity and past (Strassler 2010). In the context of tsunami monuments it is possible that calling a monument *asli* implies that it will always be more powerful and meaningful than any other (in this case human-made) monument.

As Rowlands and Tilley (2006: 500) explain: “Monuments are powerful because they appear to be permanent markers of memory and history and because they do so both iconically and indexically, i.e. they can evoke feelings through their materiality and form as well as symbolize social narratives of events and sacrifices retold in public rituals.”

People engage with this monument in its material form in different ways, by looking at it, climbing it and leaving messages on its smokestacks. When I visited the ship with tsunami survivors it always evoked stories of the disaster. In 2012 I visited the ship with my husband, an adult Acehnese family member and three children aged nine, ten, and thirteen. The ship had entered a new stage of monumentalization and could not be approached as long as it was under construction. There was a fence around the site, while the space around the ship was turned into a small park, with constructions that looked like houses hit by the disaster (and apparently had been constructed for that purpose), a memorial stone, an entrance gate and a parking lot. Since we could not go near the ship we went into the Tsunami Education Park, where several other visitors, including a few foreigners, were walking around on the paths or sitting on benches in the shade. Pictures of the tsunami and information about earthquakes hang on a wall at one side of the park. In a niche, three walls were literally covered with dozens of pictures. Visitors went in to look at them. The children who went in came running out after a few seconds, describing the most gruesome images and saying that they were scared and did not want to go back in there. Unlike in the tsunami museum where images had been selected to prevent evoking people’s ‘traumas’ (see below), the visitors of the park were not spared. In the midst of the rather tranquil and nicely set up garden, the shocking photographs recall the horror that befell the city. I suggest that they do so in a way quite different from the images shown in the Tsunami Museum. The Museum, together with the other official memory places, is a place where one remembers, where memory gets a ‘place’ and is distanced from the everyday and the progressive political call to look towards the future. The uncensored photographs in the Tsunami Education Park, however, seem to make such distancing impossible, perhaps engaging the visitor in a much more forceful way than the impressive experiential architecture (see below) of the museum could do.

Let us turn now to the second ship in Banda Aceh that has been turned into an official tsunami tourist site. This is the ship on a rooftop in the fishermen’s neighborhood of *Lampulo*.<sup>150</sup> As with the *PLTD Apung* it seems to be the incongruity of a ship on the land, the physical presence in the ‘wrong’ place, as well as the stories attached to the ship that make it a powerful symbol of the tsunami. As we saw earlier in this dissertation, what is most out of the ordinary most forcefully evokes the tsunami as an event that stands far apart from everyday experience. The ship is one of the tourist places that figures in

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<sup>150</sup> See picture 5.

promotional brochures and on the municipal website and it has been turned into a monument that includes a memorial-plate and a staircase that goes up to a viewing platform from which visitors can look at the boat. When I visited the site in 2012, a kiosk with refreshments and one with Acehnese and tsunami souvenirs (such as t-shirts) had just opened. Visitors were encouraged to write down their name and country of origin in a visitor's book and they could hire a guide. They could also get a little booklet with several stories of local tsunami survivors.

Apart from symbolizing the disaster in a similar way as *PLTD Apung* does, the ship in *Lampulo* is also a symbol of survival, as more than fifty people were saved because they climbed on the ship during the tsunami. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of December 2009, the local newspaper *Serambi Indonesia* published an article on tsunami commemorations that had been going on the previous day, exactly five years after the tsunami.<sup>151</sup> The article describes how residents of *Lampulo* came together at the site of the monument to pray. The neighborhood head captured in one sentence how the ship memorializes disaster and survival: "We have chosen this location so that the society can commemorate the terror of the tsunami waves, because this ship saved 59 citizens of *Lampulo* when the disaster struck." Through the commemorative rites collective memory and continuity with the past are enacted (Connerton 1989). Not only its official marking, but the act of collective prayer at the site gives meaning to this place. The focus of this collective remembering is not only on the past, but is clearly situated in the present as well as being future oriented. As the neighborhood head says later in the interview: "We hope that this act of praying together can become a mode of unification and of sticking together between the citizens of *Lampulo* in welcoming development and progress in better directions."

In 2012, I saw that the Islamic character of the tourist site was emphasized by a banner hanging above the ship that welcomed the visitor to "the tsunami monument ship on a house, as Allah warning tourist object". In the next chapter, I will look at how the tsunami is often explained as a warning from God. Here, it is important to note how tourism is given an Islamic dimension. The emphasis on Islamic tourism fits with the marketing strategy of Banda Aceh which I will discuss below. Yet it also fits well with the affective dimension of the site, where collective memory is shaped through the practice of prayer.

#### *Mass graves and the selection of memory sites*

Compared to the ships, mass graves are even more important sites for prayer. BRR made the mass grave in Banda Aceh (near the *Uleelheue* harbor) into a memorial site that includes the mass grave and the remnants of a former hospital.<sup>152</sup> The site is gated and carefully tended; with signs indicating the mass grave of adults and the mass grave of

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<sup>151</sup> 'Hujan air mata warnai zikir dan doa bersama' *Serambi Indonesia*, 27 December 2009.

<sup>152</sup> See picture 6.

children, a *bale* (traditional community house) where people can rest and pray, and an entrance gate decorated with devout texts. Some grave stones for individuals stand on the lawn where the mass grave is located. Another big mass grave is situated near the village of *Lambaro*, outside the municipal boundaries of Banda Aceh. Many tsunami victims from the city were buried there and urban residents frequently mentioned the site as an important memorial place. On regular working days both of these grave sites are usually deserted, but many people visit them on Islamic holidays. Some survivors told me that on those days they would pray for the dead at different mass graves. Others regularly went to the grave where they assumed their deceased loved ones to be. On the other hand, many other people did not regularly visit a mass grave and emphasized that according to Islam it did not matter where one prayed for the dead.

Clearly, the presence of thousands of bodies of people who died in the tsunami waves makes the graves into powerful memorial sites. Although the graves themselves were made by people, their presence is, as with the two ships, almost a direct consequence of the disaster. However, the selection of the graves that have been designated as official memorial sites is much less natural or logical. While the *Uleelheue* mass grave has been turned into a memorial site and figures as one of the city's tourist places, and some other mass graves have been looked after through the creation of an entrance gate or a space for prayer, others have been abandoned and forgotten. Such was for example the fate of a mass grave in the inner-city neighborhood of *Kampong Jawa*, where according to the neighbors some 1000 bodies had been buried. The wooden, handwritten sign that indicated the location when I first visited the site in 2008 has been overgrown in recent years. Similarly, although *PLTD Apung* and the ship in *Lampulo* became official monuments, two other ships that I saw in 2009 and that were located only a couple of streets away from *PLTD Apung* were not part of any visitor guide. The neighbors had no idea what would happen to these ships. A monument is only a monument when it is separated from the rest of urban space, singled out as being a unique site of memory. Selecting specific sites to become tsunami monuments or memorials necessarily implied forgetting others. BRR, the provincial and municipal authorities selected the memory sites for various reasons. But it may also be the people who visit the sites and the invisible histories that haunt these places that make them stand out as well. Finally, as official tsunami monuments, these places became authorized by the state. In chapter two we saw how the mysterious appearance of a child in the Tsunami Museum, which could have been interpreted as occult, was perhaps legitimized partly because it took place in a state-authorized tsunami memory place. The following section will discuss this museum.

*The Tsunami Museum: education, experience, and the politics of remembering and forgetting*

In contrast with the ships and the mass graves, the Tsunami Museum was not a 'direct' consequence of the tsunami, but created in the reconstruction process.<sup>153</sup> It is unclear who came up with the idea of building a museum and why (Zilberg 2009). However, it figured in the plans for rebuilding Aceh soon after the tsunami. In 2007-2008 almost none of Banda Aceh's residents I spoke with had heard of the plan for the museum.<sup>154</sup> But when hearing about it, many people reacted quite positively to the idea.<sup>155</sup> The main reason for this enthusiasm was, as with *PLTD Apung*, the perceived need to remember in the future. Thus, many people referred to the value that a museum would have for coming generations: there, their (future) grandchildren could learn about the disaster, so they would know what to do if it would happen again. This emphasis on learning may not be surprising when seen in the broader Indonesian context in which museums are often seen as educational institutions.

The Tsunami Museum, designed by the Indonesian architect Ridwan Kamil and located next to the colonial Dutch cemetery in the city centre, was rapidly built by BRR in 2008. Its costs amounted to \$6.7 million<sup>156</sup> and the construction was at least partly sponsored by the Indonesian ministry of energy and mineral resources (ESDM). In February 2009 the Indonesian president visited Aceh to officially open the museum, but a week later it closed again due to a lack of budget and because the building was still empty. In August 2009 the museum opened again for two weeks in the context of the big Aceh expo event that is held only once in five years. It welcomed many visitors and the people I spoke with enjoyed both the building and the photo and art exhibitions that were related to the tsunami. However, after the event it was closed again.

In 2010 the museum was open and on my brief visit I learned that it regularly attracted more than one hundred visitors per day. In 2012 I visited the museum again, this time with Ibu Elli, whom we met in chapters two and three. Though we visited the museum on a regular working day, there were many other visitors. The museum building has the shape of a large ship. It stands on pillars, leaving the space between the ground level and the second floor open to walk through or hang out in the shade of an oval-shaped pond, where one can sit down even when the building is closed. The whole middle of the building is open, while exhibitions are placed in the rooms on the window sides of the second and third floors and corridors lead in circles around the open and empty space. The 'ship' has a

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<sup>153</sup> See picture 7.

<sup>154</sup> By then, a competition had been held and a winning design had already been chosen. The non-inclusive approach that allowed virtually no participation of Aceh's residents and tsunami survivors in either the idea for a museum or the decision making on the design, sparked almost no protests (Zilberg 2009).

<sup>155</sup> Nevertheless, some people made the cautious remark that they thought a museum would be good, but not before all tsunami survivors would have received houses.

<sup>156</sup> Mentioned in: 'A tragedy revisited in Banda Aceh.' *The Jakarta Globe*, 23 November 2011.

tall 'smokestack' which is formed by a tower that runs up from the ground. From the rooftop, which is also meant to be a safe place where people can run to in case of another tsunami, one has a wonderful view of the city. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to go up to the roof.

Upon entering the museum building, the first step visitors take is into a narrow and dark corridor where we heard Qur'an recitation and felt water falling from two walls to our sides. We passed through without saying anything and entered a semi-lit room that was made up of broad steps that led slightly upwards. Throughout this room and spread out over the different steps stood concrete pillars with screens on which a selection of photographs of the tsunami passed as slide shows. Several visitors were looking at the pictures. Elli and I stood in front of one of the columns and she commented on almost all the pictures. She recognized one of the people in a picture, a girl who was holding onto something in the water. She pointed out where people were helping others and she started to tell me stories about the tsunami, about her own experience as well as that of others. We moved on and came to the huge smokestack-tower in which light came only from the glass roof high above on which the name of Allah had been painted in Arabic script. We heard continuous Qur'an recitation and read names of tsunami victims that had been inscribed on the walls of the tower. Elli kept telling stories about the tsunami as we moved on, into the daylight and onto the bridge that ran upwards over the pond below, through the open middle of the building to the second floor. There, a nine minute film about the tsunami was about to start. The film room was already quite full with visitors but we found two seats next to each other. The film showed moving images of the tsunami, of people grieving and of the arrival of assistance. Elli said several times that this was exactly what it had looked like at the time and that it was so sad. When the film was over, we spoke with an attendant of the museum. He said that there was a longer version but that this one had been edited so as not to show the dead bodies, because, he said, people still had trauma and this could be too shocking (something, I noted above in the description of our visit to the Tsunami Education Park, it could indeed be). But, the attendant continued, people in Aceh did not have trauma like disaster victims in other places would have. They left everything up to God. People in Aceh, the attendant went on, looked towards the future, while this here [the museum] was a place to remember the past. He added that the film made many people extremely sad.

Painted footsteps on the floor indicated how Elli and I were to continue our tour through the rooms. The rooms on the second floor showed pictures and dioramas of tsunami scenes as well as tsunami objects (objects affected by the tsunami, see chapter three), such as a bicycle. Elli pointed out the scenes in the pictures. We passed through the library and information boards on earthquakes and tsunamis on the third floor before leaving the building to sit down and rest on the shaded stairs in front of it.



With hundreds of visitors per day, according to the attendant we spoke with, the Tsunami Museum seems to be successful. Further research is needed to explore how other visitors experience the Tsunami Museum. However, building on the above description of the tour with Elli and the politics that preceded the opening of the museum, I offer here some initial thoughts on its 'place' in the process of remembering and forgetting the tsunami in Banda Aceh.

Let me first of all return to the often made remark that the museum is meant to teach future generations about the tsunami. This educational component is clearly present in the museum's collection, including the film, photographs, objects, dioramas, library, and scientific information about earthquakes and tsunamis. All of this information about the tsunami is also provided in English for foreign visitors. One observer has remarked that the museum is "the most sensible starting point to understand the enormity of what occurred." He also points out the experiential component of the museum, comparing it to Libeskind's Jewish Museum.<sup>157</sup> Indeed the museum seems to fit within a global trend of what Duffy has called museums of 'human suffering' (Duffy 2001), not only because of its theme (an event of human suffering), but also because of the way in which it is intended to create an embodied experience that is reminiscent of the event. Indeed the embodied experience as well as the symbolism of the first part of the museum, including the darkness, sounds and touch of the water, the sound of Qur'an recitation, and the movement from the darkness into light commemorates the embodied experience of the tsunami (see chapter two). Significantly, however, unlike in the nearby Tsunami Education Park the images of dead bodies have been cut out of the film. Though some corpses do appear in the photo series in the exhibition rooms, the most horrible photographs have been left out. Finally, the museum not only fits in the global development of thematic museums of human suffering, its symbolic and experiential architecture also seems to cross the often porous boundaries between museums, monuments and memorials.

But as much as the museum is, as the museum attendant said, a place in which one remembers the tsunami, like other memorial objects it also helps to forget (Forty 1999). Or, as Harrison put it, "[a] society's material technologies of memory are always also its technologies of forgetting (...)" (Harrison 2004: 35). Clustering memory in one place makes possible forgetting in others, as people select what to remember and how to do it and in the process exclude other places and possibilities of remembering. Memorial places then become bearers of collective memory that stand out against the forgetful urban space in which everyday life is being remade. The process through which they become established is political; as is the question of which 'sites' (spatial and non-spatial) come to represent collective memory. Simpson and Corbridge (2006) therefore analyze memorials in terms of the "political aesthetics of memory". In this respect, I argue that, apart from all the other

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<sup>157</sup> Ari Sharp, 'A tragedy revisited in Banda Aceh.' *The Jakarta Globe*, 23 November 2011.

meanings of the Tsunami Museum, the museum was also a BRR prestige project that, quickly finished before the end of BRR's term and together with the Aceh Thanks the World Park (see chapter one), was a monument to reconstruction, showing the 'successful' completion of the reconstruction process. The political aesthetics of memory in the Tsunami Museum, I suggest, is founded on a double forgetting – forgetting the tsunami suffering in a triumphalist message of looking towards the future and a more general spatial forgetting of the recent conflict.<sup>158</sup>

The first form of forgetting is reflected in an exemplary way in a small leaflet that seeks to promote 'the tsunami trail' and describes some places that people can visit to learn about the tsunami (or 'discover the experience' as the subtitle says). The opening quote captures the way in which BRR was looking for 'closure' near the end of its term:

The mourning for the thousands of tsunami martyrs continues no more. Now, its time to stand up, and built [sic] what needs to be build [sic] for the future. While the event has past [sic], this doesn't mean it has been forgotten. In fact, it will be remembered over-and-over again immortalized in local wisdom. Retracing the tsunami's path is an appropriate way to do this, and following are some of those places. (BRR NAD-Nias)<sup>159</sup>

This is a progressive narrative that looks towards the future and declares the past history, a process that has been closed off ("mourning... continues no more") and that we can now start to remember. In contrast to mourning, memorializing can supposedly be done in certain places, part of the city but standing out from the everyday. Moreover, the political motive for remembering the disaster through celebrating overcoming and rebuilding towards the future, which is also represented in BRR's slogan 'building back better', is apparent here (see also chapter five). Memorials often show "triumphalism" by asserting "collective omnipotence" (Rowlands 1999: 131). The BRR text above implies that past inabilities or failures should be forgotten; now it is time to "built what needs to be build for the future" [sic]. Memorials like the Tsunami Museum may thus serve to show that order and authority have been restored, or, as it were, are back 'in place'.

This is particularly remarkable in the context of Aceh's past conflict and the absence of peace memorials that would memorialize this conflict. Again it should be clear that

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<sup>158</sup> Memorials can of course also oppose this kind of forgetting. Christopher Duncan, for example, shows how by making memorials, local communities in post-conflict North Maluku endorse their own narratives of history in a reaction to government efforts to forget the conflict and gloss over its religious nature (Duncan 2009). The Tsunami Museum, on the contrary, is a project initiated and endorsed by the Indonesian government, therefore serving different political goals than the memorials studied by Duncan. In both cases, however, the endorsement of one narrative of history means forgetting about others.

<sup>159</sup> Leaflet: 'The tsunami trail: discover the experience' published by the Tsunami and Disaster Mitigation Research Center (TDMRC) and the Canada- Sri Lanka University Consortium for Post Tsunami Restoration, 2008.

memorials do not just “exist in order to remember an event” (Simpson and de Alwis 2008: 7). For building a collective identity as well as an attractive urban image (see below), publicly remembering the natural disaster is a politically useful tool, especially when cast in a rhetoric of overcoming and building a better future. Selective remembering and forgetting is required in nation building. Abidin Kusno observes in the context of post-colonial architecture in Indonesia that “(...) what should be officially recalled to foster a sense of national identity implies a cultural consensus as to what should be overlooked.” (Kusno 2000: 16). Arguably, it is through the representation of the natural disaster that the state can afford to overlook the politically problematic part of Aceh’s recent history. The emphasis on public tsunami places in relation to the absence of any peace memorials may signify not only the political and public sensitivity of representing the conflict, but paradoxically also the possibility that tsunami memorial places instead of conflict memorial places offer to show triumphalism and the reinstatement of (national state) authority. The politics of remembering and forgetting that I refer to here can be seen both in the prominence given to remembering the tsunami while overlooking the conflict, and in the way in which the tsunami monuments effectively turn the disaster into an event of the past while emphasizing that order has been restored and that people should now focus on the future.

### **The tourism campaign**

On a municipal level the tsunami memory places serve to market the city in the context of a large scale effort to attract tourists to Banda Aceh. Interestingly, these sites (as well as other urban attractions) were already called ‘tourist places’ (*tempat wisata*) from the start. This term is far more inclusive than just ‘monument’ or ‘memorial’. Tsunami tourist places are indeed marketed for tourism in a broad sense. In Indonesia one can be a ‘tourist’ in one’s own city. The *tempat wisata* is a place anyone can visit for leisure; a place, simply, that stands out from everyday life – not only for outsiders, but also for local residents. The term therefore captures one of the main aspects of the monument/memorial, namely that it stands out from the rest of public space. On the other hand the term ‘tourist place’ is so broad that it does not specify how the place should be interpreted, for example as a place where one should ‘remember’ or just as a place for recreation.

However, Banda Aceh’s municipal authorities also use the ‘tourist places’ in the narrow sense; to attract tourists to the city and to put Aceh on the map. Tsunami tourist places such as *PLTD Apung*, the boat on a rooftop in *Lampulo*, the *UleeLheue* mass grave and the Tsunami Museum are included in leaflets for tourists and figure on the municipal website among other landmarks.<sup>160</sup> Marketing the city to increase tourism has become an important part of Banda Aceh’s economic strategy and was, at the time of my fieldwork,

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<sup>160</sup> [www.bandaacehkota.go.id](http://www.bandaacehkota.go.id), last accessed May 23, 2012.

one of the main preoccupations of Banda Aceh's planning department, where government officials developed plans for, among others, 'tsunami tourism', 'ecotourism', 'spiritual tourism' and 'culinary tourism'. Banners and signs with the city's slogan *Bandar Wisata Islami* (city of Islamic tourism) promoted the tourist strategy throughout the city. *Banda Aceh Bandar Wisata Islami Indonesia* is the official municipal motto for the five-year period of 2007-2012. The year 2011 was the year of tourism, called 'Visit Banda Aceh 2011'. The official tourism website includes a Visit Banda Aceh 2011 theme song, in which the city is praised for its heritage, Islam, safety, peace and beauty (amongst others).<sup>161</sup> Under the heading of 'destinations', the website promotes a 'tsunami track', a 'spiritual track', and 'Banda Aceh heritage.' Tsunami tourism has thus become a central element of the marketing strategy of Banda Aceh.

The tsunami tourist places are not only important to the urban planners for economic reasons. The image of the city that is created with the aid of Banda Aceh's heritage (including the tsunami places) is meant for (foreign) tourists, but also engages urban residents in an effort of collective identity building. This is for example reflected in posters that urge people to keep their city clean. Banda Aceh should be a city that people can be proud of and this is best presented through the historical places that give reason to be proud of, such as places that reflect Aceh's Islamic piety, tsunami places that represent collective suffering and overcoming, and historical places that recall the colonial struggle and freedom or the earlier strong position of the Acehese Sultanate. Islamic piety may be the one characteristic of the city marketing project that the Acehese themselves are most proud of. As part of the slogan (city of Islamic tourism), it is promoted on all kinds of banners in the city. Yet, critical citizens and Islamic scholars wonder whether the *Islami* in the urban slogan is really part of the tourism campaign, arguing that the way in which tourism is currently stimulated contradicts rather than reinforces Islamic values.<sup>162</sup> These worries about the incompatibility of the tourism campaign and Acehese identity clearly show the strategic importance of creating an image of the city that reflects and reinforces urban collective identity.

The tourism campaign also fits well with the broadly carried determination to give Aceh a 'place-in-the-world' (see chapter one). This, for example, seems to be reflected in the repeated claim of Banda Aceh's mayor that the electricity ship *PLTD Apung* should become the ninth World Wonder.<sup>163</sup> To become such a place-in-the-world, and have its specialness recognized by 'the world', the city needs to reach out to worldwide communities. The tourism campaign can therefore be seen as an effort to create what

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<sup>161</sup> [www.bandaacehtourism.com](http://www.bandaacehtourism.com), last accessed May 23, 2012.

<sup>162</sup> See for example 'Akar Permasalahan Bandar Wisata Islami' by Teuku Zulhairi (13 May 2012), [www.acehinstitute.org](http://www.acehinstitute.org), last accessed May 17, 2012.

<sup>163</sup> See 'Kapal Apung diharapkan jadi keajaiban dunia ke 9' *Serambi Indonesia* 18 July 2009, and 'PLTD Apung diharapkan jadi keajaiban dunia' *Serambi Indonesia*, 1 March 2010.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett calls “a sense of ‘hereness’” that is “necessary to convert a location into a destination.” (1998: 7). Banda Aceh aims to become such a destination by marketing its formal tourist sites. The next section, however, will turn to informal tsunami memorials, places that are not ‘visited’, but that still bring to mind the tsunami in the midst of everyday forgetting and remaking.

### **Inscriptions that turn walls into a monuments**

Cleaning up after the tsunami was a very thorough process. Apart from the designated tsunami tourist places, today few ordinary places in Banda Aceh directly remind one of the disaster. However, scattered throughout the city some walls of former houses are still standing and on some of those walls people have painted tsunami-related texts. They stand out, like monuments, but they are not regarded as tourist sites. However, the act of inscription has turned the walls into informal and probably temporary monuments. The tsunami walls reinforce the messages written on them and the inscriptions turn the walls into a human made monument, rather than being simply the left-over debris of (super)natural forces. While they stand out from the reconstructed neighborhood spaces, these walls also stand *for* the rest of the neighborhood – which immediately after the disaster looked exactly the same. The inscriptions then turn these places into spaces of collective memory, standing out but also reaching out to the rest of urban space and beyond.

#### *26 December 2004*

The most common inscription found on ‘tsunami’ walls in Banda Aceh is the tsunami date, *26 Desember 2004*, or *26-12-2004*. It appeared, for example, on several of the old walls of the inner city neighborhood of *Peunayong*.<sup>164</sup> But the date also appeared on other still standing walls, as well as on objects and for example on the big ship, *PLTD Apung*.<sup>165</sup> Why the date? Besides the intentions of the persons who put the dates in place, through continuous repetition the date arguably not only comes to symbolize the event, but also turns the disaster into a historic moment; something past that has to become part of collective memory.

One morning in July 2009 I had a short conversation with a Chinese-Indonesian motor rickshaw driver in *Peunayong*, which is one of Banda Aceh’s oldest neighborhoods and the area where many Chinese-Indonesians live and work. The man I talked with, Pak Rudy, was waiting for a school kid whom he always brought home after school. He was born and

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<sup>164</sup> See picture 8. Damaged but not destroyed by the tsunami, these houses were in full use again soon after the disaster.

<sup>165</sup> I only found the inscriptions, including the date, on pre-tsunami objects and walls or on the debris itself, but never on newly constructed houses. These houses bear their own signs: the many logos of different aid organizations visibly remind of their origins.

raised in Banda Aceh and during our conversation he told me how he had been hit by the tsunami water but survived the disaster. At a certain point I asked him about yearly commemorative activities on the tsunami anniversary date, which is often described as *ulang tahun tsunami*. *Ulang tahun* can be translated as birthday or anniversary and is used not only for personal birthdays but also for, for example, the anniversary of the founding of the city – and for the tsunami anniversary. After a short pause he said, slowly and with emphasis: “the year 2004, the 12<sup>th</sup> month, the 26<sup>th</sup> [day] (*tanggal 26*).” And after another pause he added: “the 26<sup>th</sup> [day], 8 o’clock.” And he went on to describe what people were doing at that specific time of that specific Sunday (he himself was a Buddhist, providing transportation for church-going Christians).

Indeed, the specific time (8 o’clock) and the specific day formed the starting point for many stories of the tsunami. Some people described to me in great detail what they had been doing on that fatal morning. They seldom left out the exact time the earthquake started. Many went on to describe how long the earthquake had lasted and how many minutes thereafter the water came. In people’s stories these intervals ranged between five minutes and more than an hour. What is important here is not the exact time it took for the waves to reach the shore but the precision with which many people tried to specify these moments. During interviews, some people apologized to me for not remembering the exact time periods.

The exact time and date is not something that only frames survivors’ accounts. Numerous official reports of international organizations and governments as well as journalistic accounts start with the phrase ‘on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2004...’ followed by other numbers, such as the specific time, the magnitude, the distance from the Sumatran coast, and, later on, the numbers of the dead and displaced. Perhaps, summing up facts not only gives the readers (who of course already know about the tsunami) a sense of familiarity that forms the starting point for beginning such an account, but also gives the text a certain authority. For the tsunami survivors, specifying the day and time may be important for reasons of (apparent) objectivity and authority, but the continuous repetition of these precise, temporal, facts may also both distance the tsunami as a historical event and keep it close through the precision of the details. The 26<sup>th</sup> of December of 2004 has become a historic day, one of those crucial dates of the Acehnese history. It is a date that deserves a yearly *ulang tahun*, past but timeless and never to be forgotten<sup>166</sup> – and always, but not continuously, remembered. Arguably, in this way memory clusters around and adheres to the date; the date itself becomes a *lieu de mémoire*. This may explain the regular

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<sup>166</sup> In his article on the Beautiful Indonesia team park in Jakarta, John Pemberton shows how the date of Indonesian Independence (17-8-1945) has been transformed into a sacred number that stands apart from history as an “ahistoricized point of reference” (1994a: 246). I do not suggest that the tsunami date has become such a sacred number outside history as well, but I think it does ‘cluster’ memory in a way in which ‘26 Desember 2004’ becomes more than just a date in a historical sequence.

appearance of the date in graffiti inscriptions on tsunami walls. If something has to represent the tsunami, it had better be this historic date that lives on forever in a timeless way (as does, for example the Indonesian Independence day of the 17<sup>th</sup> of August and in Aceh, probably to a somewhat lesser extent, the 15<sup>th</sup> of August as the anniversary of the peace agreement).

*'The world cried'*

I will discuss two more specific wall inscriptions. Although they are not the only ones that I saw in Banda Aceh, I find them striking for their messages that reach out to worldwide communities, and for their locations, both in the middle of a neighborhood.

The apparently hastily scrawled text on the wall in picture 9 says:

Minggu 26-12-004 / pagi hari / dunia menangis / di tanah A[tjeh]

Sunday 26-12-004 / morning / the world cried [or cries] / in the land of A[tjeh]

Of the last word (probably Atjeh) only the 'A' is still clearly visible.

As can be seen in picture 9, behind the walls that are still standing a house has been rebuilt, just as in the surroundings. The remains of this building are located in *Kampong Jawa*, one of the oldest and most severely hit parts of the city. On my most recent visit to Aceh in 2012 a neighbor told me that the owners of the house died in the tsunami and their children, who lived elsewhere, had inherited the land. Up until now they had not rebuilt the place. The wall and the message cohere into a powerful and emotional message, recalling the tragedy and the sadness and pain of the disaster that not only destroyed this building but 'the land of Atjeh'. In this way the message and the building come to stand for the whole of Aceh, referring to the disaster as such instead of only to this particular place. Susan Stewart has called this kind of graffiti "free-floating pieces of discourse" that become monumental, transcending their context of origin "and at the same time neatly containing a universe." (Stewart 1984: 53, in Spyer 2006b: 202-203).

A second thing that is particularly striking is the precision of the moment of the disaster that has been discussed above. The inscription in picture 9 goes even further than just stating the date by adding that the disaster happened in the morning (*pagi*). Interestingly, the word *hari* was added, so that the time connotation now literally says 'morning of the day'. The use of this *pagi hari*, instead of only *pagi*, even gives the phrase a poetic touch that sits awkward with the haste in which it seems to be written. The subject of the phrase is the world: '*dunia menangis*' (the world cries/cried). Therefore the text not only refers to the whole of Aceh, it engages the whole world, "indexing a universe" (Spyer 2006b: 203), thereby both emphasizing the sense of tragedy and giving Aceh a place in the (attention of the) 'world'.

In picture 10 another ‘tsunami wall’ shows an inscription that seems, as the text in picture 9, quickly written. It says:

Umat / mari mendekatkan diri kepada Allah / Amin

*Umat* / let us come closer to God / Amen

The text does not refer directly to the tsunami. However, as we will see in the following chapter, many people in Aceh explain the tsunami as a divine intervention. According to one explanation, God sent the disaster because of moral degradation in Aceh and because people had forgotten their religion. Many people said that the Acehnese have to learn from the tsunami to become better Muslims. Although the link is not made explicitly in the message on this wall, the message seems to fit perfectly within this narrative. The tsunami wall only reinforces its message, because in juxtaposition with the message the wall seems to reveal what happens when people forget about their religion and God. And like the inscription in picture 9 that tries to engage the ‘world’, this text, written on the lower half of a wall of a ruined house in a regular neighborhood far away from the main road, calls out to the whole Islamic community (*umat/umma*), engaging (almost) everyone who may pass by. These still standing walls in the middle of reconstructed neighborhoods reach out to global communities with a religious message and as an act of commemoration.

## Conclusion

*The everyday built environment, like monuments constructed for commemoration, enacts the dynamics of memory and forgetting, but it operates often without demanding a state of spectatorial concentration to gain effect.* – Abidin Kusno 2003: 153 –

As Kusno points out, the dynamics of remembering and forgetting are an inherent part of the process of making and remaking the everyday environment. Just a few years after the tsunami only few places in the city still directly evoked the disaster. In the destroyed and subsequently reconstructed neighborhoods even the uniformity of the houses that visibly showed ‘reconstruction’ quickly disappeared as the owners modified them by adding new rooms, gardens, and fences (see chapter one). Only in some places did foundations or walls of former houses remain or did texts on the still standing walls recall the disaster. This does not mean that the rebuilt places do not continue to evoke tsunami memories. Indeed, many of the survivors referred to personal objects and places in their homes, neighborhoods and the city as a whole to support their story of the tsunami (cf. Hastrup 2011). While moving through the city, many places spontaneously evoked memories of the disaster. Yet, people often remarked that although they would always remember the tsunami, they did not always think about it. As we already saw in chapter three, they would always remember, but not always be reminded of the disaster. Although memories become attached to places,



remaking these spaces and remaking everyday life requires a remembering that does not constantly remind one of the disaster; remembering that is based on prior forgetting (Forty 1999). Rebuilding the city, then, necessarily involves forgetting; a forgetting in space that is needed to remake the unconscious and elusive urban everyday.

Compared to the examples in chapter three, the memorial places discussed in this chapter thus enable the process of ‘not always remembering’ in a spatial way. It is in the interface with spatial forgetting that the tsunami monuments and memorial places gain their symbolic power. These are places that stand out from the rest of urban space and are important to urban identity. They memorialize the tsunami and serve as focus points for remembering in the future. Their materiality and location in urban space gives these materialized collective memories a sense of permanence. These are places that residents of Banda Aceh can visit to ‘see’ the disaster. But they are also destinations, for visitors and future generations, that provide material ‘proof’ of the disaster. These places are thus “embodied” not only through physical movement and encounter but also in the ways in which they are imagined and narrated (Low 2009). At the same time the act of making these places into monuments also involves a process of forgetting that is always part of memory’s “political aesthetics” (Simpson and Corbridge 2006). As I showed in this chapter, this involves forgetting about other places and other versions of collective memory as well as forgetting about other histories that could have been memorialized in space, notably that of the recent conflict. As political projects the tsunami tourist places in Banda Aceh serve to legitimize a certain order and, paradoxically, support a progressive narrative of rebuilding towards and remembering in the future instead of discussing the past. I will return to this dimension of post-disaster remaking in the next chapter, which focuses on imaginations of the future through different temporalities.

Kusno asks how architects, city governments, and urban dwellers “reconfigure time by remaking space” (2010: 5). This chapter has shown how remaking urban space in the post-tsunami city involves engaging with different temporalities. The pre-tsunami past is present in the displacements and absences that are part of places (de Certeau 1984) and in the embodied spaces (Low 2009) that include memories and experiences that are invoked while moving through the city and visiting tsunami memory places. Forgetting and not always being ‘reminded of’ is crucial for remaking the present everyday. The presence of long-lasting material mnemonics – monuments – in public space ensures the future remembering of the past and enables spatial forgetting and the remaking of everyday life in the rest of urban space. Buildings, and monuments, can never “adequately stand in for memory” (Kusno 2010: 10). However, the built environment provides one important way of creating collective memory. And it is precisely the different meanings of objects and places and the “fragmentary, multiple, incomplete and imprecise nature of the experiences

of the visual and spatial environment” (Kusno 2010: 157) that make urban space such a crucial site of social remembering and forgetting.