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

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Propositions accompanying the dissertation
After the Tsunami: The Remaking of Everyday Life in Banda Aceh, Indonesia
By Annemarie Samuels

1. Individual experiences and creativity are as important to the post-disaster remaking of everyday life as social patterns of vulnerability and resilience. A focus on emerging subjectivities enables anthropologists to address both dimensions and their entanglements.
2. The post-disaster remaking of everyday life should be studied as a long-term process that involves many different dimensions of social life and that continues long after the end of the period that policy makers usually demarcate for reconstruction.
3. The overwhelming attention of aid agencies to the construction of houses, as compared to other fields of reconstruction, can be explained not only by the importance of housing as a basic need, but also because of their visibility and measurability and because the effort of replacing houses is supposed to be apolitical.
4. Because gifts are part of exchanges that aim to create or continue relationships, receivers of the post-disaster aid gift may not see the gift as humiliating, but instead actively gloss aid as a gift, to enable the continuation of the relationships with aid-givers.
5. Because uncertainty about the truth is the defining characteristic of a rumor, scholars should not treat rumors as metaphors of speaking about something else, but instead inquire into the social and psychological effects of the possibility of a rumor being true.
6. Rather than being the opposite of Islam, in post-tsunami Aceh the process of grieving was closely intertwined with Islamic practices.
7. In Aceh, grieving is generally considered to be a step by step process of giving memory a place in particular religious and non-religious practices and moments.
8. While many anthropologists of Islam start by studying Muslims' religious moralities to show that non-religious moralities also play a role in their everyday lives, it would be more fruitful to start by studying moralities in the everyday lives of Muslims' to show how and when Islam becomes important.
9. While the ways in which tsunami survivors affectively engage with tsunami monuments and memorial places in Banda Aceh demonstrate their importance as long-lasting mnemonics in the midst of a forgetful urban space, the politics of their making and the future oriented discourses that surround them also make apparent the political usefulness of remembering a disaster if that memory masks the forgetting of other pasts; in Aceh most notably that of the recent conflict.
10. Rather than instilling fear, explanations of a disaster as an act of God may enable the remaking of everyday life and increase aspirations for the future.
11. The centrality of serendipitous encounters to the anthropological method both favors and compels anthropologists to direct attention to what is at stake for the people they study.
12. The realization that emotions are neither simply cultural constructions, nor universally similar experiences, should bring the effort to create emphatic understanding to the core of the anthropological method.