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Post-Disaster Urban Renewal: Memories of Trauma and Transformation in an Indonesian City

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Post-Disaster Urban Renewal: Memories of Trauma and Transformation in an Indonesian City¹

In Banda Aceh in the years before the tsunami
We once painted our dreams and aspirations
Yet the waves swallowed you without graves or tombstones
Only grief has become my intimate companion, without even a token ring
Dino Umahuk, Banda Aceh, 16 March 2008²

The day the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and undersea earthquake struck off the coast of the Indonesian island of Sumatra remains deeply etched in the minds of most Acehnese people. So pervasive and widespread was the trauma of 26 December 2004 that it became the reference point by which people living in Indonesia's north-westernmost province of Aceh reconfigured the organisational patterns of their memories into 'before' and 'after' periods. Before the tsunami struck, life in Aceh was far from idyllic as the province was ravaged and isolated by a bitter and bloody three-decade long armed separatist conflict between Indonesian government security forces and Free Aceh Movement (*Gerakan Acheh*³ *Merdeka*, GAM) guerrillas. This conflict, which since its inception in 1976 had claimed some 15,000 to 20,000 lives, persisted unabated in Aceh's countryside for almost eight months after the tsunami (Miller 2009: 1).

After the natural disaster, however, many of the last vestiges of civilisation disappeared entirely along Aceh's battered coastline as whole villages were washed into the sea and more than 160,000 Acehnese perished while another 500,000 were internally displaced. Such was the magnitude of the tsunami that in an instant collective memory was born as communities were irreparably changed. Even the 'normalcy' of the conflict temporarily ground to a standstill as the warring parties struggled to come to terms with an event so abnormal that it shook the pre-existing social order.

It was through the tsunami that Aceh's capital city of Banda Aceh was introduced to most of the rest of the world. The hundreds of foreign and Indonesian journalists who flocked to Banda Aceh in the wake of the Boxing Day tsunami broadcast images onto television screens and internet monitors around the globe of a city in ruin, reduced to rubble and rotting corpses. However, while outsiders were able to bear witness to this extraordinary event, their cameras could not capture the dramatic departure from normal life or the palpable sense of permanent change that accompanied it.

A draft of this paper was presented at the *Conference on Trauma, Memory and Transformation: The Malaysian and Southeast Asian Experience,* Monash University, Sunway Campus, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, 22 – 24 June 2010. The conference was organized by Benjamin Donald McKay (13 April 1964 – 18 July 2010).

² Translated excerpt from the Bahasa Indonesia poem 'Di Banda Aceh Tuhan Memanggilmu Kembali' [In Banda Aceh God Called You Back] by the Ambonese poet Dino Umahuk.

The original British spelling of 'Acheh' was generally preferred by GAM, reflecting the rebels' rejection of the modern Indonesian spelling. Despite his outspoken opposition to most other things Dutch, GAM's founding leader, Hasan di Tiro, also used the old Dutch spelling of 'Atjeh' to establish the 'Atjeh Institute in America' and GAM's 'Ministry of Information of the State of Atjeh Sumatra' (*Kementerian Penerangan Negara Atjeh Sumatra*) (see, for example, di Tiro 1965; di Tiro 1984).

Nor were they able to film the human disaster of the Aceh conflict, which persisted for eight months after the tsunami. Although Jakarta lifted its ban on foreigners from entering Aceh immediately after the tsunami to allow for the distribution of international aid, the Indonesian military- which itself suffered massive losses in the tsunami- sought to control coverage of its ongoing counterinsurgency campaign against GAM in the hinterlands by requiring foreigners to apply for special permits for travel outside Banda Aceh and the west Aceh city of Meulaboh which was hardest hit by the tsunami and was closest to the undersea earthquake's epicentre (Miller 2006: 310). It was not until August 2005 that the Indonesian government and GAM rebels reached a negotiated settlement in Helsinki that granted Aceh broad self-government within Indonesia.

In this essay we are concerned with the transformation of the city of Banda Aceh from a theatre of war into a relatively peaceful province under the nascent system of 'selfgovernment' in Indonesia within the context of the dual crises of the 2004 tsunami and conflict. Many individual Acehnese narratives have been recorded about the disruptions and emotional effects of the human-made and natural disasters. These have been documented in books, poetry collections, art exhibitions, films, music and academic writings on the psychology of trauma (see, for example, Soelaiman 1992; Burman et. al. 1993; Wachid 1999; Eda and Dharma 1999; Ishak 2000; Ghani 2000; Zamzami 2001; Magnis-Suseno 2001; Tippe 2001; Ismail 2006; Kemalawati and Sulaiman 2005; Cahanar 2005; Muhammad 2007; Eda and Ismail 2009). We approach the subject somewhat differently by giving trauma and memory a collective frame of reference through the lens of Banda Aceh city. Our focus is on the transformative effect of Aceh's twofold human and natural disasters on the provincial capital and how collective memory of trauma is embodied in the lives of its residents as well as in the urban form (monuments, memorials and museums). We trace the changing position of Banda Aceh in its relations with other parts of Aceh and the outside world to examine how recent memories of trauma have shaped the city's transformation in the remaking of this long-troubled province.

In approaching the vexed and sensitive issues of collective memory and social trauma, we draw from Indonesian and English secondary source literature in the form of books, journals, newspaper articles and psychological reports. To a lesser extent, we rely on semi-structured interviews conducted in and around Banda Aceh during previous research trips between 2000 and 2011. We acknowledge that there are no clear or concrete answers to difficult questions about collective memory and trauma, and that such questions cannot be quantifiably measured, just as they may not be gauged in a qualifiable manner with any certainty, especially over time. Yet given the pervasiveness of such issues in Aceh's post-disaster landscape the collective memories of shared traumas that are being incubated today will likely have portent for the type of Acehnese society that is born tomorrow and how it thinks about itself. This essay offers a preliminary exploratory glimpse into the makings of that society.

VIEWING TRAUMA THROUGH THE FOGGY LENS OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that collective memory, like individual memory, often has fuzzy connotations and contested meanings that change or are reconstructed over time. In general, collective memory tends to denote either the sum composition of socially framed individual memories or 'collective phenomena sui generis' (Olick 1999: 333). The former category privileges social relations and processes in conceptualising collective memory as the 'stories society tells about the momentous events in its history, the events that most profoundly affect the lives of its members and most arouse their passions for long periods' (Osiel 2000: pp.18-19). As such, it often involves competition over how the narratives of traumatic events are told as well as in the degrees of standardisation over what is told. The latter revolves around the Durkheimian notion of society as a regenerating and selfmaintaining entity in collective memory creation (for example, through commemoration rituals, memorialisation and the reproduction of collective images) while downplaying the social processes of adapting collective memories to changing circumstances and conditions (*Ibid*; Misztal 2003: 128). This second category suggests that collective memories can exist and be appealed to even as the memories of individuals and groups of people dim and fade. In other words, whereas individuals tend not to readily recall events that have no direct bearing on their own lives and adaptive circumstances, collective memories may be preserved for future reference through the institutionalised commemorative symbols that society constructs for itself (Gieson 2004: 144; Pennebaker and Banasik 1997: 5-6).

Of course, both situated patterns and social processes have their place in collective memory-making. While different forms of memorialisation serve to organise and situate collective memory in space and time, the 'movement of traumatic memory qualitatively changes the social field' and slips fluidly between the constructed spaces of active remembrance (Parr 2008: 15). Within these two dimensions, it is also possible to identify more fragmentary collective memories according to variegated points of reference. People who experience direct trauma have different collective memories and reference points than those who read or hear about a crisis. For instance, we can safely make the generalisation that the Acehnese people were collectively traumatised by the 2004 tsunami, but there are considerable variations within Aceh itself as to how the natural disaster was experienced and thus remembered. Unlike the people living in Aceh's interior, survivors from coastal areas collectively share a lived experience of the tsunami. In the seaside city of Banda Aceh alone, the pre-tsunami population of 264,168 people was reduced to 203,553 after 61,065 residents died and seventy per cent of the infrastructure was destroyed (Nurdin 2006: 116; Martha and Utomo 2007: 262).

These differentiated experiences have produced diverging emotional narratives. Whereas survivors can recount stories of their personal confrontation with death and witnessing friends and family perish or being swept out to sea, these are dimensions that can only be imagined by people residing in the interior. Conversely, during the conflict (1976-2005) there were far more stories of direct encounters with violence (assault, rape, torture, kidnappings, killings, burning of homes and internal displacement) in Aceh's countryside, where the worst of the fighting between the warring parties took place, than in Aceh's coastal urban centres (for a more detailed study of this urban-rural divide, see Miller and Bunnell 2010).

These fragmented experiences are in turn represented in the two aforementioned streams of collective memories. In the former category that prioritises social relations, collective memories of the conflict are primarily confined to the informal social sphere rather than being officially memorialised. A notable exception is the Museum of Aceh Human Rights, which was inaugurated in March 2011 in Banda Aceh amidst much controversy. So politically sensitive was the opening of the museum that its founding director, Reza Idri, emphasised that 'There is no intention at all for us to open old wounds here... We only want the past to be remembered and to serve as lessons for the future' (The Jakarta Globe, 26 March 2011). For some Acehnese and other Indonesians alike, this physical reminder of the conflict had the potential to destabilise the Aceh peace process, especially when collective memories of the violence remain so intense among the wider community, and when many of the victims and their families, as well as the perpetrators, are still present. At the same time, the institutionalised rendering of meaning to a shared traumatic past has the potential to serve as a deterrent to repeat history. By contrast, in the case of the tsunami, which was seen by Aceh's almost homogenously Muslim population as an act of divine intervention, the two dimensions of naturalised collective remembering through story-telling on the one hand, and collective memory production in the form of mass graves, a tsunami museum and other commemorative public spaces on the other hand, can comfortably coexist.

Another distinction between socially framed and constructed collective memories is that only direct experience of trauma in the former category is likely to result in flashbacks. Among survivors of traumatic events flashbacks and nightmares are common, often for protracted periods. For example, psychiatric studies of survivors of the 1941 Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour found that although the bombings lasted for less than two hours the 'experiences of fear, terror and helplessness were of sufficient intensity to persist and reoccur sporadically throughout the lifetime of the survivors' (Neal 1998: 6). Similarly, in Aceh 'nightmares, anxiety and panic attacks, disbelief, survivor guilt and anger were reported to be widespread in the communities directly affected by the tsunami' (Carballo et al. 2006: 218). Of course, this does not mean that indirect trauma is not also severe, and there has been growing recognition of the dangers of indirect Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, especially in the intergenerational transmission of PTSD in the descendents of Holocaust survivors (Kidron 2003). After the tsunami, too, an emotional impact assessment of Singapore medical teams found that 'even indirect exposure to a large-scale disaster like the tsunami can be traumatic and can lead to acute stress reactions that are indicative of PTSD among medical mission workers' (Chan and Huak 2004: 155).

As mentioned above, collective memories of war are sometimes more fragmented and complicated than memories of natural disasters. How war and violent conflict are remembered depends on such variables as the proximity of particular groups and individuals to the battlefield as well as which side of the conflict people are situated or ideologically invested in. Yet societies that have experienced war continue to be largely framed as being "collectively traumatised or in a state of melancholia" (Nagel 2010: 29). This is despite the fact that discourses about 'collective trauma' cannot be divorced from political agendas about competing nationalisms. Writings about the Aceh conflict tend to privilege two dominant stories in collective memory production, both of which artificially construct the Acehnese as a singular cultural and ethnic entity (Miller 2009: 142). The Free Aceh Movement (GAM)

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⁴ There is no word for 'nightmare' in Acehnese or Indonesian languages as such phenomenon are culturally situated within a framework that treats dreams as the work of mischievous spirits called *jin*, but these are still considered to be an integral part of the trauma process (Grayman et. al. 2009).

promoted their homogenous representation of the Acehnese in a bid to further their cause to re-establish a pre-colonial style independent sultanate of Aceh. 5 Jakarta also singled out the Acehnese as an ungrateful group of perennial troublemakers within the Indonesian nation. Needless to say, these sorts of absolutist claims by both GAM and Jakarta are overstated on a number of levels. The Acehnese are not ethnically homogenous as almost twenty per cent of the provincial population is not ethnic Acehnese, claiming membership of at least seven indigenous ethnic minorities as well as non-indigenous minorities. 6 Claims about the shared struggle of the Acehnese against Indonesian rule based on a common ancestry and the 'collective memory' of an independent Acehnese sultanate are also misleading, as are assumptions that all Acehnese were directly involved in the conflict. Yet the purpose of such collective memory-making is not to achieve historical accuracy but rather to mould memory into a political weapon to bolster irreconcilable nationalist ideologies (Osiel 2000: 13). In this, it involves competition over how stories are told and by whom, as well as degrees of essentialisation in what is told. This mnemohistory, which, 'unlike history proper... is concerned not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered' (Assmann 1997: 9), is imbued with a sense of social solidarity in which the goal is to construct a singular memory by evoking what Durkheim calls the 'collective conscience' that coheres around shared values (Morrison 2006: 169). Such singular memory creation is sometimes achieved via insidious and repressive processes, especially in times of war or under authoritarian regimes and military dictatorships.

In the case of Banda Aceh, however, the city's residents experienced the trauma of war quite differently from people living in Aceh's countryside, where the worst of the fighting took place between GAM and Indonesian government security forces. In contrast to the tsunami, which directly affected Banda Aceh residents and not people living in the predominantly rural interior, for the most part people living in Banda Aceh were insulated from the direct impact of the fighting (Miller and Bunnell 2010: 5). This is because for the greater portion of the twenty-nine year conflict (1976-2005), President Suharto's authoritarian New Order regime (1966-98) managed to retained control over Aceh's coastal urban centres while demonstrating its intolerance of separatism by waging an aggressive counterinsurgency campaign against GAM in the hills. It was only after the initiation of Indonesia's national democratisation process in 1998 that Jakarta's governing presence in Aceh's cities became attenuated, as evidenced by the growing size and frequency of anti-Jakarta and pro-*Aceh Merdeka* (Free Aceh) rallies in Banda Aceh from this point onwards.

The geographical partitioning of the violence in turn produced different collective stories of the conflict between directly and indirectly affected areas. These separate narratives were reinforced by the mass media, which, until the collapse of Suharto's New Order regime in May 1998 was heavily censored and had to report on the Aceh conflict from an Indonesian nationalist perspective. It was only from 1998 that the newly liberated national media began

GAM's nationalist claim, which was widely accepted in Aceh but rejected by most outside sources, was that the conflict stemmed from the 1873 Dutch invasion of the 'State of Acheh Sumatra', and was perpetuated by the 'illegal' transfer of sovereignty from the Dutch colonialists to Indonesian-Javanese colonialists. The authoritative text on Aceh's war against the Dutch East Indies and subsequent incorporation into Indonesia is Anthony Reid's *The Blood of the People: Revolution and the End of Traditional Rule in Northern Sumatra*

More than 80 per cent of Aceh's population is ethnically Acehnese. The largest indigenous minority are the Gayo people, who number around 200,000 (or 5 percent of Aceh's population), and the biggest non-indigenous minority are Javanese settlers, who constituted about 7 per cent of the population (275,000 people) in 2000 (Reid 2006: 4-5).

to provide critical coverage of the conflict, including extensive reporting on atrocities committed by Indonesian security forces personnel against Acehnese civilians. As one Banda Aceh resident recalled upon learning of the discovery of several mass graves in the countryside:

I was really shocked in 1998. Of course, we heard rumours about bad things happening [elsewhere in Aceh], but we didn't really know *how* bad or how widespread it was. I always felt safe during 'DOM' [informal acronym for Indonesian military-led operations from 1989 to 1998]

(interview, Jakarta, 11 November 2001).

By contrast, outside of Banda Aceh and a handful of other urban centres, the daily experience of villagers (especially in the war-torn districts of Pidie, North and East Aceh) was one of fear, fighting, forced migration and internal displacement (Miller and Bunnell 2010: 5). This uneven geography of violence led to the production of a different kind of collective narrative whereby anybody 'from a high conflict area in Aceh could tell you the stories of at least two or three people from his or her own village that have suffered from *stres* [stress], *trauma* [trauma], and *pungo* [Acehnese term for crazy] due to traumatic experiences during the conflict' (Grayman et al. 2009: 79). In the worst affected conflict areas, such collective memories provided a kind of glue that continued to bind communities together long after the fighting ended in August 2005. These shared memories offered some measure of comfort to survivors, but at the same time they constituted a burden, especially in households where conflict-related mental illnesses constrained domestic economies and served as unfortunate daily reminders for the rest of the community of what had happened there. In many such communities, the 'inability to forget the past and move on is simultaneously one of the most personal and communal barriers to peace-building and recovery' (*Ibid*: 79-80).

The spatial segregation of these direct and indirect strands of conflict trauma memory began to merge into a more unified narrative after 1997, when the Asian financial crisis and subsequent transition towards democratic rule after three decades of authoritarianism under President Suharto's New Order regime (1968-97) dramatically reduced Indonesia's governing capacity nationwide, and especially in troubled regions like Aceh. Swept along by the tide of pressure for democratic change, Jakarta rolled back its military presence in Aceh, with the result that Banda Aceh was able to briefly emerge as a vibrant centre of civil protest. At the heart of this newly awakened city, the iconic nineteenth century Masjid Raya Baiturrahman- Banda Aceh's Great Mosque- became the favourite stage for province-wide demonstrations and rallies against Jakarta and Indonesia's armed forces. The biggest of these mass demonstrations was the so-called 'rally of millions' of 8-9 November 1999, in which some 500,000 of Aceh's then population of 4 million people gathered at the Baiturrahman Mosque to demand a referendum with two options: 'To Join or Separate (Free) from RI [Republic of Indonesia].'⁷

It was during this brief window of democratic openness that the collective narrative of social trauma became the most cohesive among Acehnese groups and individuals who were

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Banner hanging on the wall of the Baiturrahman mosque at the November 1999 rally.

otherwise divided along demographic, socioeconomic and political lines. ⁸ Whereas the flourishing of democracy is typically associated with a diversification of public opinion and expression, to some extent the reverse occurred in Aceh as the military withdrawal allowed Acehnese people to openly unite in opposition to Indonesian rule. ⁹ Increased opportunities for travel within Aceh also enabled many Acehnese to start making sense of their shared experience of Indonesian interference and neglect and to seek collective forms of redress for their suffering. For the first time since the large-scale military crackdown, communities that had once been cut off from each other could now share and compare what they had lived through in 'their own traumatic versions of the conflict, each with their own fearful scenarios that feed back into the community and spiral wildly into terrifying futures' (Grayman et.al. 2009: 68).

Such open displays of Acehnese solidarity were short-lived. Alarmed by the rapid growth of GAM and Aceh's pro-referendum movement, Indonesia's Aceh approach gradually hardened throughout 1999 to include a dominant emphasis on counterinsurgency operations aimed at crushing Acehnese separatism. As the political middle ground in Aceh gradually disappeared amidst the intensifying military crackdown, so too did the flows of communication and networks between Banda Aceh and other parts of the province. Within this deteriorating security environment, Aceh's provincial capital was transformed from a flourishing hub of civil society activity into a picture of eerie quietude and authoritarian control (Miller and Bunnell 2010: 8). This situation persisted until the December 2004 tsunami, when the biggest natural disaster in living memory provided a catalyst for Banda Aceh to begin renewing its connections with the outside world after a protracted period of relative isolation.

COLLECTIVE TRAUMA AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Large-scale traumatic events tend to leave an imprint on group consciousness that translates into a dimension of cultural identity. Collective trauma feeds into cultural identity as the stories that society tells itself about traumatic events suggest new causal relationships and ascribe meanings to link events with their own lives and circumstances. In this sense, cultural identity created through collective trauma could be understood as 'a force of *social becoming*' which from the ruins of the disrupted social order sows the seeds of 'a new cultural system' (Sztompka 2004: 194). Within this process of becoming, communities 'not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering, but 'take on board' some significant responsibility for it' (Alexander 2004: 1). This selective embedding of collective trauma thus provides 'the raw materials for the recreation of society as 'moral community' (Neal 1998: 2). In other words, crises experienced collectively cast a spotlight on the moral underpinnings of society, throwing into question the basic values of social life. In struggling to restore order and coherence to lives disrupted by conditions of trauma.

The social cohesiveness of Acehnese civil society during this period was evidenced, for example, in public opinion polls conducted by local and other Indonesian newspapers, and by growing collaboration between Acehnese NGOs around particular issues, especially in relation to human rights abuses, opposition to Indonesian oppression and support for an East Timor-style referendum on Acehnese self-determination.

This does not mean that all Acehnese were pro-independence and anti-Indonesian integration, but the majority wanted to decide Aceh's political status within or without Indonesia. For example, an opinion poll conducted in June 1999 by the Medan-based *Waspada* newspaper found that fifty-six per cent of Acehnese wanted a referendum on independence, compared with 23.5 per cent who preferred broad autonomy within the Indonesian Republic ('Hasil Lengkap Jajak Pendapat Waspada: 56% Referendum Dan 25,3% Otonomi Luas', *Waspada*, 7 June 1999).

societies, or elements of them, feel the need to revisit the social glue that binds people together to create a sense of community and belonging.

This has certainly been the case in Aceh, where religion has played a powerful role in cultural identity in coming to terms with the twofold tragedies of the conflict and tsunami. The almost entirely Muslim province ¹⁰ has a reputation as being the most devoutly Islamic part of Indonesia and is the only province allowed to implement Islamic law (*Shari'a*) in its entirety. ¹¹ The importance of Islam to Acehnese identity is reflected in the local saying that 'the relationship between *adat* [customary law] and [Islamic] law is like our essence with our character' (*adat ngon hukom lagee zat ngon sifeuet*) (Said 1999: 75).

Yet Islam and Islamic law (*Shari'a*) have been used to cope with the twin traumas of the conflict and tsunami in very different ways. During the conflict, GAM and their civilian supporters were strongly influenced by Islamic conceptions of social justice and *jihad* (holy war) stemming from perceptions of outside interference and neglect. Within this Islamic framework centred on social justice, Indonesian state perpetrators of violence were collectively 'othered' as pariahs, as fake Muslims and as *kafir* (infidels). GAM also rejected what they saw as the unwanted imposition of Islamic law from Jakarta, arguing that the purpose of forcing *Shari'a* upon the Acehnese people in wartime was to discredit GAM's independence cause in the eyes of the international community and to 'make us look like Afghanistan' (*Reuters*, 11 December 2000). Although Islam formed an integral part of Acehnese identity, the claims by GAM and their supporters to a separate political status were explicitly nationalist in nature and the rebels never sought to establish links with Islamist movements elsewhere (Miller 2010: 31).

Immediately after the 2004 tsunami, however, Islamic law began to take on a life of its own, most visibly in and around Banda Aceh where the humanitarian agencies and journalists were most densely concentrated and where the survival of mosques amidst the sea of rubble reinforced the widespread belief in the role of divine intervention in the disaster. The great majority of Acehnese people tried to make sense of and cope with the trauma through Islam. As the Christian non-governmental organisation World Vision found in their interviews with Banda Aceh residents, 'the culture of Islam is an excellent antidote to fear and grieving' (Mashni et al. 2005: 46). Somewhat differently, Médecins Sans Frontières observed in their psychological evaluation of tsunami survivors in Banda Aceh that 'Without exception, the people we spoke with during the assessment understood the tsunami as a punishment or a warning from Allah for being 'immoral'' (de Jong et. al. 2005: 487). Related to this commonplace belief that the tsunami was divine punishment for the collective sins committed by the Acehnese people was the idea that strict adherence to Shari'a was necessary to prevent another disaster (UNDP and Bappenas 2006: 66). This message was often repeated by Islamic religious leaders (called *ulama*) in mosques during Friday prayers, both to advance their own conservative agendas and to protect Acehnese culture against what they saw as the corrosive moral influence of non-Muslim foreign aid agencies and journalists. It was a message that verged on 'moral panic', or 'collective hysteria in response to uncertainty and threat- in which some inimical agent is identified as attacking something held sacred'

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In 2004, 97.5 per cent of Aceh's 4.2 million people were registered as Muslim, 1.8 per cent as Catholic and 0.7 per cent as Hindu or Buddhist (Dexter 2004: 9; BPS/BAPPEDA 2000: 32)

It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe the processes and systems of Islamisization in post-tsunami Aceh in any depth. For more detailed accounts of the legalities and social dimensions of the implementation of Islamic law in Aceh in the post-conflict, post-tsunami era see Miller 2009; Miller 2010.

(Smelser 2004: 52). It was also a message that demanded collective guilt and expiation. During the first Friday prayers after the tsunami, for example, the General Secretary of the Indonesian Ulama Council (MUI) told some 2,000 worshippers at Banda Aceh's Baiturrahman Mosque that they might have been the cause of the disaster 'because we have forgotten Him [Allah] and His teachings and failed to implement Shari'ah law' (WorldNetDaily, 8 January 2005). Such sermons quickly reverberated throughout the province bearing the same basic message that 'The tsunami was because of the sins of the people of Aceh' (timesonline.uk, 22 December 2005). The survival of mosques in Banda Aceh and the nearby fishing village of Lampu'uk were also widely interpreted as testimony of Allah's intervention in the disaster and a warning to the Acehnese to become better Muslims. Although national and international NGOs sought to dispel these religio-cultural explanations and to assuage the sense of guilt felt by many Acehnese by erecting roadside banners and providing tsunami/ earthquake education programs, such messages continued to be promoted in mosques throughout Aceh and infused into collective narratives to explain the disaster.

It was not surprising, then, that Islamic law was so uncritically accepted by many Acehnese who grappled to come to terms with the trauma through Islam and in Friday prayers. Interpreting and making sense of the calamity within a religious framework allowed people to find meaning in loss as well as a sense of redemptive purpose. Not everyone agreed with the way *Shari'a* was being interpreted and implemented in post-tsunami Aceh, but within a deeply sensitive and conservative social environment it was very difficult to be openly critical.

Still, the public visibility of Islamic law after the tsunami (for example, in the form of Arabic street signs, billboards bearing *Shari'a* messages, expanding religious institutions and the wearing of Islamic dress) has been concentrated in and around Banda Aceh. This is mainly because Islamic law enforcement is strongest in the provincial capital. But post-tsunami Banda Aceh has also been a magnet for Acehnese and other Indonesian Islamist forces who have seen their role in the rebuilding of Aceh as being to defend the moral fabric of Acehnese Islamic identity against non-Muslim aid agencies (Miller 2010). At one level, then, the proliferation of Islamic symbolism in Banda Aceh could be interpreted as an etching of collective social trauma into the urban landscape, or what Irwin-Zarecka calls part of the 'infrastructure of collective memory' (1994: 13). On another level, the growing Islamicisation of Aceh's provincial capital could equally be understood as a process of *social becoming* in which collective trauma is creating a new cultural system that comprises, at least in part, more Islamic forms of Acehnese identity.

COMMEMORATION AND COMMODIFICATION OF CATASTROPHE

Post-tsunami, post-conflict ¹² Banda Aceh bears few visible signs of the trauma that is embedded in the collective and individual memories of its residents. In the years since the 2004 tsunami flattened the city, the urban infrastructure has been completely rebuilt and people have moved on with their daily lives to the extent that Banda Aceh today looks almost like any other Indonesian town. Insofar as the cityscape bears physical traces of its recent tragic past, these are mainly in the form of carefully maintained memorials, museums and mass graves for the tens of thousands of tsunami victims who died there.

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Our usage of the 'post-' prefix is not intended to denote the complete overcoming of both phenomena, although the large-scale reconstruction efforts in the wake of both events have been aimed at achieving that effect.

Memorialisation of traumatic events takes on many different forms and serves a multitude of personal, social, political and even economic purposes. Memorial cultures and public spaces of remembrance influence to varying degrees which traumas are inter-generationally remembered (through collective memory creation in the form of the reproduction of images, films, commemoration rituals, and so on) and how they are remembered (through social relations and processes in the competition over what is told and by whom). Through the active recollection of traumatic episodes at sacred sites and in commemorative rituals, the past is infused into society's collective identity and redrawn to shape the present (Bal 1999: vii). Even among individuals, the past may be recast during pilgrimages to such sites as they navigate the layers of meaning attached to them. For instance, the mass graves peppered around Banda Aceh may at once represent safe havens that are removed by space and time from the tsunami as well as dangerous sites that evoke powerful reactions and painful memories.

In Banda Aceh, memorial culture has simultaneously connected and disconnected people from the conflict and the tsunami. It is easy to locate public reminders of the tsunami in the form of a tsunami museum, well-maintained mass graves and a series of beached boats on top of buildings that constitute the commodification of loss and the foundations of a local 'tsunami tourism' industry. More difficult to find are remnants of the three-decade long armed separatist conflict between GAM and Indonesian government forces. Yet as Jennifer Jordan explains, sites of remembrance may be notable in their absence, especially when collective memories remain alive and well but memorial culture exists in a 'memorial vacuum'(2006: 29). As mentioned earlier in this paper, with the notable exception of the Museum of Aceh Human Rights (which was only opened in March 2011, almost six years after the end of the Aceh conflict), this has been the case in Banda Aceh, where public reminders of the armed separatist conflict have been largely erased from the city's landscape. What wars are memorialised are those that have been safely relegated to a distant past that is no longer perceived as threatening to Indonesian national cohesion and territorial sovereignty (namely, the Dutch-Aceh war [1873-1913] and the Indonesian war of independence [1945-50]). ¹³ With the current Aceh peace process still vulnerable to diminution and with memories of many of the victims (or their survivors) and the victimisers still intensely alive, the politics of memorialisation remain deeply sensitive in Banda Aceh-Jakarta relations. Under such conditions, the potential exists for contest over how the past conflict is appropriated to itself become a new 'battlefield' of 'collective memories from "within" as well as "outside" the nation' (Muzaini and Yeoh 2005: 345). Expediently, then, like many other post-conflict societies both Acehnese and Indonesian authorities have decided that in the interests of protecting the current peace process memorialisation is an 'extravagance the nation could ill afford' (Muzaini 2004: 38) and must be sacrificed to the more immediate task of making reparations for the social, political and economic costs of the recent traumatic past.

The need for testimonial facilitation and recognition of Banda Aceh's conflicted past is partially met through largely informal commemorative gatherings for remembering, mourning, celebration and reflection on specific days that hem the conflict. These are the anniversary of the formation of the Free Aceh Movement (4 December 1976) and the

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The three main war memorial sites in Banda Aceh include: 1) the *Kerkoff Peucut* Memorial for Dutch soldiers who died between 1873 and 1910 in the war against the Acehnese, 2) the Seulawah Airline Monument to commemorate the Acehnese' purchase of the first plane for the Indonesian republic in the independence struggle, and 3) the house of Cut Nyak Dien (1948-1908), the Acehnese anti-colonial resistance heroine in the Aceh-Dutch War.

inauguration of the current Helsinki peace process that brought an end to the violence (15 August 2005). Such gatherings tend not to be site-specific and are tied more to a sense of Acehnese community and identity than to the built environment. Through these commemoration rituals, collective memory is inscribed onto individual experience of the conflict and its resolution and suppressed traumatic memories are given a socially legitimate forum within which to surface and find voice.

Beyond these formal and informal structures and processes of memorialisation in Banda Aceh, there is the still limited business of trauma tourism. As Parr puts it, 'the industry of memorial culture is semiological and traumatic memory provides new raw material for the market to expand' (2008: 168). Phrased differently, there is money to be made from society's fascination with trauma and in post-disaster environments tragedy can be turned into economic opportunity. Tapping into the broader phenomenon of 'disaster tourism', Banda Aceh's governing administration recognised the potential for tsunami tourism by inaugurating in February 2009 an architecturally spectacular US\$7 million tsunami museum. However, this expenditure caused controversy among Acehnese NGOs and civil society representatives who accused the government of misallocating funds that could have been better spent in helping the local population to rebuild their lives and livelihoods in the wake of the disaster. Since its grand opening by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, the museum has also remained largely closed to visitors amidst ongoing construction issues, and its sparse exhibit walls bear testimony to a lack of organisation and management.

At the grassroots level, there has been some evidence of local entrepreneurship in exploiting the potential of tsunami tourism, although this too remains limited. There have been sporadic reports of civilians charging entry fees to climb and photograph boats that were beached atop buildings during the tsunami rather than pay costly demolition fees to have them removed, but during the authors' own visits to such sites there was no such business in place. Still, through this preservation of collective memory embodied in the urban form, trauma has become enshrined in a way that is almost romantic and even entertaining for those who have not lived through the loss and devastation. These landscapes in turn reconfigure collective memory and re-actualise the experience of trauma the more time that elapses and as individual memories wane and fade away. Specific sites, some of which we have mentioned here, are not only imbued with forms of remembering but also play a more active role in (re)producing or sustaining memories in ways that can be variously traumatic or therapeutic (Bunnell 2007).

CONCLUSION

In recent memory, Banda Aceh and its residents have endured and been transformed by two major traumatic events. The city's skyline and surrounding coastline were completely reconfigured by the 2004 tsunami, which obliterated seventy per cent of Banda Aceh's physical infrastructure and killed or displaced most of the local population. The city, too, has been indelibly marked by almost three decades of war, and since 1998 alone it has oscillated between authoritarianism and democratisation, and between violent conflict and the current Helsinki peace process.

Remarkably, however, apart from a handful of places of exception in the form of monuments, memorials and museums, Banda Aceh today bears few physical scars from this trauma. It is as if Aceh's provincial capital has come to encapsulate Kracauer's quintessential modern

cityscape in which 'perpetual change erases memory' (Gilloch and Kilby 2005: 6). With its shopping malls, thriving market places, rebuilt neighbourhoods and bustling networks of activity and enterprise, Banda Aceh today looks nothing like the post-tsunami scenes of death and destruction that shocked the world back in 2004. Gone, too, are the visible traces of the conflict as the city that once resembled a ghost town has been injected with a sense of renewal under the Helsinki peace process and people who used to be too afraid to leave their homes at night now flock to social events and night markets.

Beyond these outward transformations, however, a different picture emerges. Banda Aceh is a city of remembrance as well as of amnesia. While most of the city's residents can no longer physically revisit the places they once worked, played and inhabited, memory brings to life in an instant that which has been demolished. Ironically, it is precisely because of this absence that memory fills the void so poignantly. Such memories exist in multiple layers and forms. Among individuals, what exists as memory for one person is irretrievably lost for another. Yet individuals, like communities, are constantly in a state of remembering and forgetting and the very act of invoking memory evokes a lost past.

In this essay, we have identified common threads in the retelling of stories by Banda Aceh residents about the momentous events in their city's history based on their differentiated experiences of the dual crises of the conflict and tsunami. We have shown how collective memories are created differently according to whether traumatic events are experienced directly or indirectly. Whereas Banda Aceh residents can individually and collectively evoke memories of their encounters with death during the 2004 tsunami, people living inland remember the natural disaster indirectly through the loss of family members and friends. Conversely, for the most part, Banda Aceh residents experienced the three-decade long armed separatist conflict indirectly while villagers living in the surrounding countryside bore the direct brunt of the fighting and its attendant traumas of displacement and the loss of life and livelihood.

We have also shown how collective memories of traumatic events have sown the seeds of new forms of Acehnese identity while challenging and reinforcing elements of the pre-existing identity. Islam has played a powerful role in this reconfiguration of cultural identity both as a coping strategy and as a political tool for moulding the new social order. In using Islam and Islamic law to come to terms with anger, grief and loss, the resolution of trauma has often been portrayed as being contingent upon the transformation of the Acehnese into 'better people' and into a more moral society.

Finally, we have reflected on the role of active public remembrance in Banda Aceh in the memorialisation of trauma. The more time that elapses after the conflict and tsunami, the more constructed places of public remembering will come to encapsulate the collective trauma experienced by today's generation and provide entry points for indirect memory-making among the next generation. As the spontaneous and intentional memories of survivors dim and fade, these symbols and signifiers of meaning will remain as threads for weaving together the traces of a shared traumatic past. While successive generations will have no organic connections to these remnants of collective memory, the threads of this shared history of social trauma will acquire niches in emerging forms of 'Acehneseness', which in turn will recast tomorrow's cultural identity.

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