

Seen from this angle, *Islam, Humanity, and Indonesian Identity* was perhaps in need of a slimming as much as a good translation, which George Fowler has accomplished. There are minor hiccups, as when Fowler misses Iqbal's reference to the Prophet (p. 190), but the force and sincerity of Buya Syafii's thoughts are fully communicated. For readers beyond Indonesia, this book grants an insight into the state of affairs of a decade ago, well before the hopes of the Arab Spring were crushed, before Ahok was removed as governor of Jakarta by a sanctimonious coalition of the ignorant, and the Obama presidency was effaced by an orange indolence abetted by the Christian right.

Michael Laffan

Department of History, Princeton University, 129 Dickinson Hall, Princeton, NJ 08544-1017; email: mlaffan@princeton.edu.

DOI: 10.1355/sj35-3j

After the Tsunami: Disaster Narratives and the Remaking of Everyday Life in Aceh. By Annemarie Samuels. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. xii+200 pp.

After the Tsunami's disaster narratives of survivors who had to rebuild their lives after the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami that took place on 26 December 2004 convincingly illuminate an understanding of the subjective processes of remaking everyday life. It is based on the long-term fieldwork conducted by cultural anthropologist and sociologist Annemarie Samuels in the Indonesian Province of Aceh between 2007 and 2009, with regular return visits up to 2014.

The tsunami had far-reaching effects for Aceh, with a death-toll of over 170,000. The disaster not only sped up the final peace agreement between the Aceh separatist movement (Gerakan Aceh Merdeka, or GAM) and the Indonesian government, but also brought about the increased implementation of sharia law. Tremendous media attention led quickly to an increase in relief efforts and a flow of tsunami-related literature. This important work by Samuels adds

to the corpus of scholarly studies focused on life in post-tsunami Aceh, and it adds fresh insights on post-disaster recovery. As she puts it, “[d]isasters, I suggest, forcefully demand the remaking of subjectivities. Recovery is infused with politics and culture, but also with individual creativity and improvisation. When people remake society, they also remake their selves” (p. 7).

Five neatly interwoven chapters provide the reader with a framework of the aftermath of the tsunami. The recovery process is presented as an equivocal one full of paradoxes. The first chapter describes how tsunami survivors lent their voices to the reconstruction process by actively expressing their gratitude for foreign humanitarian assistance, as well as by openly criticizing the lack of help from the Indonesian government. Samuels demonstrates the ongoing dynamics between the stories of her interlocutors about their hard work to get back to ‘normal’ and the overarching discourse on governmental and humanitarian political reconstruction. The second chapter recounts the gruesome moment, retold through ‘embodied narratives’, when disaster struck. Samuels carefully intertwines terrifying accounts of the survivors that dwell on destructive waves and dead bodies with key questions and perceptions of loss. The very act of telling disaster stories is powerful and creates a “sense of being together in the world” (p. 79). But storytelling has its limits and survivors may articulate their grief through non-verbal actions. In particular, chapter 3 describes how religion—especially its practices that espouse virtues of sincerity and surrender—can help individuals come to terms with their feelings of loss. There is widespread belief amongst the Acehnese that their piety can prevent them from being overwhelmed by grief. Samuels argues that this only holds true, however, in official discourse, while private conversation reveals that grieving is omnipresent. She clarifies how her interlocutors interpret the tsunami—by following public moral discourse about the acceptance of God’s will—as a test from God to deepen their faith. They engage in private as well as collective prayer through an individual process of ethical self-reflection, which helps them to deal with loss and memory. At times, when Islamic practices prove to be insufficient to make sense of their harrowing feelings,

survivors seek refuge in the foreign concept of trauma because it is identified with general human emotions of sadness and does not deviate from religious norms.

Chapter 4 dwells on processes of (selective) remembering and forgetting of Aceh's past through memorial sites, such as the Tsunami Museum, monumental ships and mass graves. While generally appreciated by survivors for their educational purpose, these places have become significant tourist attractions that emphasize the governmental success story of reconstruction and reconciliation. Other potential sites of commemoration, however, have been left out of Banda Aceh's collective memory. Notably, the separatist conflict has only received marginal attention in the memorialization process of Aceh's past. In chapter 5, Samuels introduces the meaningful idea of "temporal momentum of improvement" (p. 132) to explain widespread ideas of opportunity for change in the first five years after the tsunami struck. She goes on to show that these ideas (as revealed by her interlocutors as well as by social-political discourse) connect with the Islamic concept of *hikmah*, or divine wisdom brought by misfortune that allows for a better future. To conclude with Samuels' words, "the narratives that people construct, silently or openly, not only represent the work of recovery but also form essential ways of finding paths into the future and remaking the post-disaster world" (pp. 157–58). This book serves as a remarkable tool of reflection for those who are interested in disaster-struck Aceh and beyond.

Judith E. Bosnak

Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society, Arsenalstraat 1, 2311 CT Leiden, The Netherlands; email: j.e.bosnak@hum.leidenuniv.nl.

DOI: 10.1355/sj35-3k

Hard at Work: Life in Singapore. Edited by Gerard Sasges and Ng Shi Wen. Foreword by Teo You Yenn. Singapore: National University of Singapore Press, 2019. xxxvi+377 pp.

Featuring a collection of everyday work experiences shared by sixty people of different professions in Singapore, *Hard at Work* offers a