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# Reclaiming post-disaster narratives of loss in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper I examine discursive and practical approaches to heritage preservation that follow the destruction of cultural heritage as a result of a natural disaster. Referring to post-tsunami reconstructions in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, between the years of 2006 and 2011, I argue that the remedial work that 'post-disaster' heritage preservation is asked to do following natural disasters involves an irreconcilable deployment of two opposite ontologies: heritage as a subject of preservation activity is either loyal to a set of heritage values that have already been articulated historically (that is, pre-disaster); or heritage is forced to become untethered from historical values in order to perform the functions of documenting and communicating contemporary (post-disaster) concerns with *future* wellbeing. At the heart of this issue, I argue, is the resistance of heritage preservation practices to acknowledge heritage value as temporally, socially, historically and politically constructed.

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Post-disaster; heritage at risk; monument; agency; temporality

## Introduction

Bridging the role of memorial and site of cultural and historic value, the reconstruction of tangible cultural heritage in the aftermath of near or total destruction is a heritage that can be seen to embody an unresolved tension: it honors the continuous existence of a cultural tradition, on the one hand, and it provides a record of loss, on the other hand. But a third narrative disrupts what is otherwise a historically-informed mission: heritage of post-disaster has the ability to support the anticipation of future loss in recurrent geological and climatic phenomena, gaining an active role in the construction of social and cultural resilience and as a tool of social wellbeing. Yet most of the emphasis of heritage preservation approaches in post-conflict and post-disaster cultural heritage across preservation initiatives, educational programs, and local and international standards is put into the documentation, evaluation, and remediation of heritage resources as *historic* resources, that is, in line with the preservation of a resource that exists independently and perhaps even predates any documented actual or potential destruction.

Therefore, while the emphasis of heritage discourses has remained focused on addressing near or total destruction of the built landscape with a view to maintain or enhance its material and social condition, I have argued elsewhere that this past-oriented emphasis prevents the articulation of emerging (creative or resistant) narratives that may be attached to new forms of post-destruction heritage (Rico 2014, 2016). This work, which emerges from the study of post-tsunami heritage reconstruction narratives, argues in support of valuing a study and embrace of destruction as a formative aspect of cultural heritage value. I discuss, in particular, the ways in which heritage preservation debates and efforts in post-tsunami Indonesia aimed to restore to some extent historic value, but more emphasis was put on future-oriented memorials that recognized

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the importance of commemorating loss in post-destruction landscapes. This debate reflects on a prolific emergence of memorials in a post-tsunami landscape that is put to work dialogically to define various heritage narratives in the aftermath of a disaster. Therefore, the present article considers the viability of post-disaster memorials as constituent parts of heritage assemblages, emphasizing as well the temporal limitations that should be made explicit in the study of use-value in heritage and its interactions with, and contributions to, a civil society. While the preservation of cultural heritage resources has tended to be propelled and justified by a moral imperative to transmit landscapes, traditions, and broadly defined cultural values to the next generation, more recent debates surrounding the use-value of heritage have addressed the ability and potential of heritage resources to contribute to social wellbeing – be it on matters of economic and social justice (see Hodder 2010); or processes of peacebuilding (see Meskell 2018). In line with this concern, scholars have argued that the (re)construction of cultural heritage resources in the context of post-disaster rebuilding efforts enables certain forms of heritage to act as agent for change and preparedness in the face of environmental adaptation to recurring environmental risk factors (see, for example, discussions in Daly and Rahmayati 2012; Dewi 2017; Dewi and Rauzi 2018), and emerging discussions of the role of heritage preservation in the construction of resilience in the context of climate change (Harvey and Perry 2015; Holtorf 2018).

In this article, I highlight the temporal boundaries that limit the study of processes and products of heritagization as I revisit my ethnographic archive of post-disaster heritage (re) constructions in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. With more temporal distance, I examine through case studies the cycle of construction, abandonment, and forgetting of tsunami memorials across the city of Banda Aceh and Aceh Besar from 2006–2010, in order to discuss the lifespan and relevance of post-disaster commemorative heritage efforts that proliferated in the years following the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. While I have avoided making an analytical distinction between the use of emerging heritage sites and the proliferation of memorials, I consider these to be constituent parts of the same post-disaster heritage assemblage and narrative that contain and transmit specific ideas of heritage value.

## **A heritage-memorial complex**

The combined Acehese disaster of 2004 consisted of a sub-aquatic earthquake off the coast of Sumatra of a magnitude of 9.1–9.3 (Richter scale) – which was described as the force equivalent to over 1502 Hiroshima atomic bombs– followed by a devastating series of tsunami waves that spread across the Indian Ocean in all directions from the epicenter, affecting the coastal regions of 14 countries. The impact that I studied was nonetheless regional and centered on the Indonesian coastal city of Banda Aceh, which was hit the hardest, resulting in over 150,000 casualties and the displacement of a quarter of a million people (in Indonesia alone). All this considered, the existing ‘cultural heritage’ and historic resources in the Greater Aceh area fared relatively well: many of the historic resources that had already been known and identified as such in this region suffered relatively mild damage (for example, the traditional house ‘Rumoh Aceh’, the grand mosque Baiturrahman, and myriad Dutch colonial structures whose construction style was allegedly of better quality than many residential styles). Some effort was therefore focused by local organizations on carrying out ‘condition assessments’ on these resources, a type of effort that is typical for post-disaster heritage preservation work which takes the pre-disaster heritage assemblages as the focus of attention and safeguarding efforts.

Focusing heritage preservation efforts on the safeguarding of pre-existing heritage resources is a known and dominant approach in the management of post-conflict and post-disaster cultural heritage resources which defines an important axiom behind various (if not all) discourses behind heritage preservation: cultural heritage heals communities, and even ‘cultures’ (Rico 2015). This dominant discourse posits that what has already been identified as having heritage value is integral to the wellbeing of a people, because, this discourse argues, the familiar or known built landscape

matters in various ways. This is an essential element of a heritage rhetoric that anchors its preservation discourse on identifying the built landscape as a landscape ‘at risk’ (Rico 2014, 2015). It claims, for example, that a heritage landscape is integral to the construction of contemporary identities as traditions are put in an intimate relationship to landscapes and objects that had actual or speculative connection to the emergence of said identities – a connection that must be preserved in perpetuity. Destruction of heritage places, therefore, is ‘more than material damage’, to pick one of hundreds of institutional calls to arms (Stenning 2015). In fact, this is one of the main ways in which heritage value and its preservation are articulated as normative, inalienable, and morally necessary.

But, besides the disciplinary concern in heritage preservation with objects and places that are already curated for having heritage value, total or near destruction in Aceh was spread across ordinary landscapes and cityscapes, resulting in what could be described as a chaos of rubble. The necessary but aggressive cleanup that followed was therefore a matter of significant concern for heritage preservationists as a liminal time marked by disorder and requiring careful sorting of valuable and non-valuable resources. This, it has been argued by anthropologists, is the necessary and observed processes of reorganization that follows natural disasters (Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999; Hoffman and Oliver-Smith 2002). Therefore, a significant part of the reorganizational work that followed the aftermath of the disaster in Aceh involved cleaning the landscape of rubble and debris in a process that invariably erased signs of the catastrophe. But, in this context, an unusual theme emerged for post-disaster heritage preservation work: the sudden (and, perhaps, unpredictable) emergence of ‘new heritage’ sites: for example, the ‘tsunami boats’ that became contemporary heritage places that transcended discursively the boundary between a memorial that marks a specific event, on the one hand, and an emerging heritage object that contains broader narratives about self-determination and identity on the other hand (Rico 2016).

Unrelated to the heritage assemblage that had been used to characterize Aceh before the tsunami, one that was significantly populated by remnants of Dutch colonial occupation, the tsunami boats displayed signs of grassroots practices of caretaking and preservation efforts in the aftermath of the disaster. This included the appearance of graffiti that identified these sites as valuable in the days and weeks following the disaster (later, this message was formalized through signage), substantial stabilization and repairs over time, the installing of viewing platforms, and the inclusion of these places in a ‘heritage trail’ for the city (see Arif 2013). Becoming a center piece of an emerging post-tsunami heritage and tourism industry, these heritage-memorials suggest that the proliferation of new memorials and the perpetuation of cultural heritage preservation agendas are in dialogue with each other. Documenting the preservation efforts and discourses around these objects of novel heritage value that do not derive their value from an appeal to a *longue durée* not only challenges a concern with continuity and authenticity in preservation. It also questions the emphasis on the idea that heritage *has already been made heritage* prior to a catastrophe, enabling more productive conversations about agency in relation to the forces of destruction. As objects of past, contemporary, and future cultural heritage value, the assemblage of post-tsunami heritage-memorials can be put to work as instruments for the study of post-disaster agency but only when they are permitted by preservationists to become witnesses, rather than victims, of destruction and (re)construction. Therefore, in this paper, I address in particular tsunami heritage-memorials as they provide productive insights into how post-tsunami heritage narratives are mobilized as tools for the reorganization of post-tsunami futures, and as resources in the construction of ideas of resilience and sustainable and practical wellbeing.

## The end of a heritage?

The processes that contribute to the construction of heritage value are bound by strict temporal limits, and so is their study. To examine the limits of heritage in its ability to relate sustainably to a narrative, I present a vignette from my ethnographic archive that complicates the temporality of

post-disaster heritage construction processes: driving into Aceh Besar from the southeast in late 2009, the road that joins the coastal city of Calang and Banda Aceh, a memorial stood somewhat concealed but at plain sight in the town of Lhok Nga. Days before the 5-year anniversary of the tsunami catastrophe, this memorial could be spotted from the road, if one was paying attention, thanks to the distinct shape of the crest of a wave peeking above the Acehnese foliage. Once visited, it was not difficult to identify, located between the *Tentara Nasional Indonesia* (TNI) military base and the Lafarge cement plant in Lhoknga. Its perimeter at the front was somewhat concealed by rows of shops that may or may not have been contemporary to a more active or living phase of the memorial, but were now fully abandoned. Although there was no caretaker, the rolling gates were kept closed but in good shape, featuring decorative ironwork bracketed by two cement statues depicting – again – cresting waves painted blue. The lot consisted of a sizeable clearance in the dense Sumatran vegetation with a low perimeter wall that was already failing at keeping out the thick vegetation that surrounded it. There was ornate tile paving on the floor in good condition, demarcating a meandering walkway from the entry gate to the back of the rectangular lot, where the main feature of the memorial was displayed: a towering metal-clad monument of twelve cresting waves oriented towards the Indian Ocean coast. It stood at least ten meters tall, and was surrounded by a circular reflecting pool, already showing signs of advanced stagnation. Other notable features of this memorial were a series of elongated concrete walls that held or could have held signage, perhaps lists of casualties in line with the style of other memorials across Greater Aceh.

At the time, I did not have a name for this place because none of my informants could tell me what it was, who had built it, or what might be its intended purpose. There was, therefore, no information on the conditions that surrounded its abandonment. Some local shop keepers explained that there used to be a school at this site, but the association between the tsunami memorial and this corner of Lhoknga remained unclear. In fact, on hindsight, I admit that without any signage or contemporary narrative for this site, there was no way to confirm that this was in any way a tsunami memorial – it was a leap of inference spurred by the cresting wave iconography. What was certain was that, by 2009, this new landscape feature had either been abandoned close to completion or had decayed quite rapidly causing not only a deterioration of its meaning but also an erasure of all evidence of who had constructed it, and why (Figure 1). Barely six months later, in 2010, I visited the memorial to find this anonymous place further ravaged by the elements: I documented the complete removal of the metal cladding, leaving nothing but the eerie skeleton of a cresting wave; a derelict reflecting pool; the disappearance of much of the decorative paving across the site under thicker layers of vegetation; and a general loss of paint and lacquer at the entrance gate. Thanks to a Sumatran weather that exacerbates mechanical and chemical processes of decay, unkept structures are easy to distinguish from those that are cared for across the Aceh province. The end of the site appeared to be near during my final visit, and therefore, I used this site in my ethnography as an exemplary case of a *dead memorial*, one that demonstrates that the state of conservation of material culture indicates at least one of these processes: a lack of availability of resources, or a failure to sustain public and/or institutional interest.

But the afterlife that I documented for a memorial site in rapid decay was temporally bound by my own intervention, and therefore incomplete. As I followed progress in Banda Aceh remotely over the last few years, I was surprised to come across more recent descriptions of this site that circulate online and paint a very different picture. These show that the memorial that I once documented as dying has in effect come back to life. It is now not only located in an informal post-tsunami tourist trail, but also identified as Tugu Tsunami Mukim Lhoknga.

## Heritage aftermath

The permanence and abandonment of different memorials across Aceh is an indication that the use-value of these sites and the narratives that they contain and communicate are in flux and



**Figure 1.** Lhoknga memorial in late 2009. Photograph by author.

diverse. On the one hand, rather than being used to commemorate the existence of a built feature lost to the catastrophe, more informal memorials were set up to designate an existing feature that was transformed by the tsunami event (and, therefore, distinguished from the ordinary and mundane). On the other hand, formal memorials emerged to commemorate and provide details of the catastrophe itself. Although the latter type showed significant diversity in the form they took and the message that they carried, what these memorials had in common was an attempt to document the extent of damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami event, and to act as an aide-memoire for the effects of such a combined disaster in real space and time. In this sense, they constituted a warning of sorts, becoming not just commemorative spaces but also potentially a part of resilience-building strategies that were intended to materialize (and sometimes qualify and quantify) risk factors in the landscape of Aceh historically and into the future. This is an important contribution to the commemorative landscape of Banda Aceh. It has been argued that the tsunami was not widely anticipated as an environmental risk at the time of the 2004 tsunami despite environmental data that suggests there was such an occurrence (McAdoo et al. 2006). Therefore, a material culture whose purpose is to not simply memorialize the event itself as part of a survivor narrative but also to communicate practical warning signs for a future tsunamigenic event brings center-stage the use-value of such features and their behavior as heritage – that is, as resources that are primarily equipped to be passed on to future generations for the wellbeing of a society.

In line with this purpose, there was another common thread in the assortment of memorials that sprouted in Aceh during the years of post-tsunami reconstruction: the prominent display of humanitarian aid marked by the labelling on memorial themselves with information about donor institutions or organizations that ‘gifted’ a memorial to Banda Aceh as part of post-tsunami recovery efforts. An example of this is the urban space in Banda Aceh called at the time the ‘Thank the Nations plaza,’ which featured a dense collection of memorials in no apparent conversation with each other. As a large open space at the center of the city, it is perhaps inevitable that this would become a display area for post-tsunami reconstruction commemoration and messages. Thank the Nations plaza was not always called this way. Before the tsunami, it was called Blang Padang and was reportedly used by the TNI for displaying military exercises. In this central and visible space, the monument Seulawah (also called RI-

001), a DC-3 airplane that commemorates a different phase in the life-history of this space and city, representing the 'contribution' of Aceh to the independence efforts of the Indonesian state. The monument and plaque, dated 29 July 1984, stand ambiguously as a reminder of the Aceh's commitment to the national project of Indonesia, despite the separatist conflict that ensued (Drexler 2008). However, following the tsunami, this public square also became a repository for an expanded assemblage of commemoration efforts. There is, for example, a parade of 'Thank you' plaques in the shape of half-submerged traditional boats displaying each an aiding nation's flag. On a plaque, the words 'Our Deepest Gratitude to [insert country]' are followed by 'Thank you' and 'Peace' in the corresponding language (Figure 2). The attribution to each one of this was to BRR, Badan Rekonstruksi dan Rehabilitasi, the reconstruction and rehabilitation agency that coordinated recovery in Aceh from the time of the disaster until 2009. They were brought together by a concrete monument in the shape of 5 cresting waves, bearing the flag of Indonesia. Its accompanying text recognized volunteers, non-governmental organizations and State institutions, businesses, civil and military, domestic and international organizations involved in the

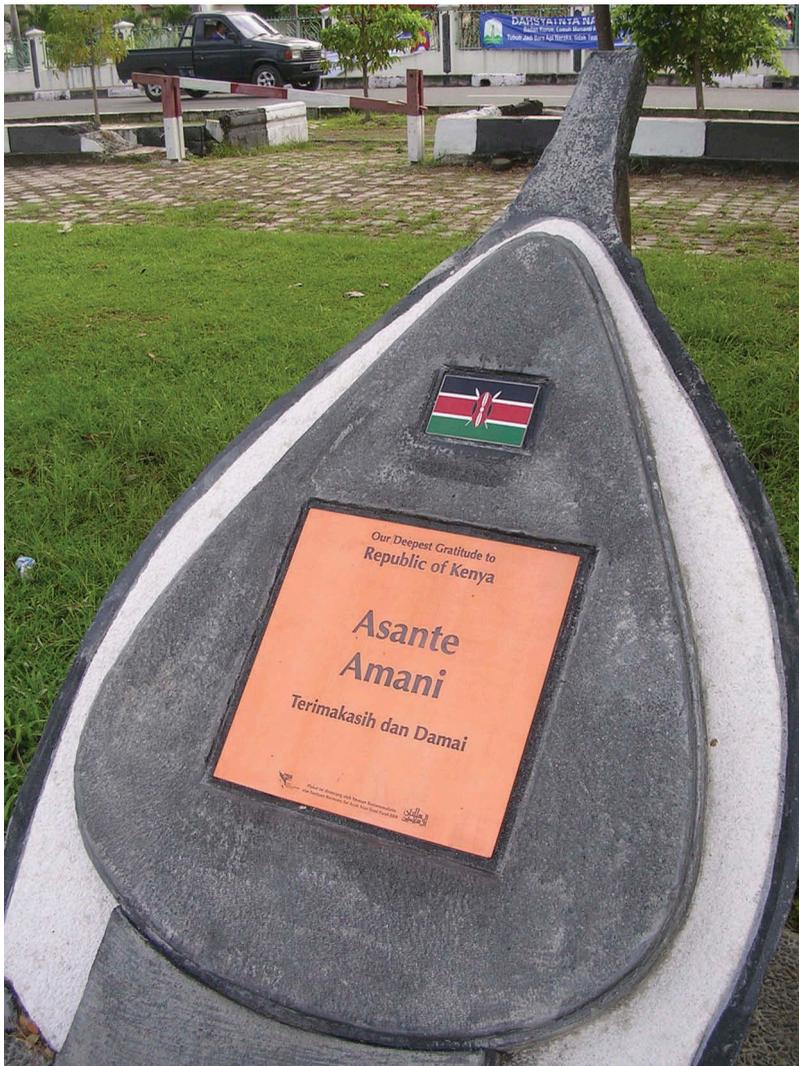


Figure 2. Tsunami memorials in 'Thank the Nations Plaza'. Photograph by author.

reconstruction efforts at Aceh. The organization behind this particular display was Pustaka Bustanussalatin.

In addition, a contemporary monument to the ‘Thank you’ memorials was placed next to Seulawah. This time, a relatively streamlined monolith in black granite with an engraved plaque duplicated in Indonesian and English read: ‘This monument is built to acknowledge a historic moment in human life that is Earthquake and Tsunami disaster happened at the Asia Pacific Ocean. On 26<sup>th</sup> of December 2004 especially in Aceh where hundreds of lives were lost and the grief were painted deeply in any human’s heart also not counting the lost of enormous material. Therefore becoming a valuable warning also reflection and most importantly knowledge for all human being on earth (sic)’. This was built by Harapan Bangsa Nusantara Foundation (Jakarta, Indonesia) and funded by the Purple Lotus Temple and the Mother Samantha Foundation, both in San Francisco, USA.

Beyond the stage of monumental display that was Thank the Nations Plaza, another assemblage of memorials was set up to convey similar messages with a touch of scientific empiricism, scattered across the city in such a way that they were easier to miss amongst reconstructed landscapes: a collection of 85 ‘Memorial Poles’ (referred to simply as *tugu*). These were simple, concrete monuments in the shape of what could be described as a lit candle each one including a plaque that documented the height, intensity and precise timing of the arrival of the tsunami wave to that spot, providing a geographically and temporally precise point in the landscape that builds a permanent display of disaster topography around the city. The one featured on [Figure 3](#) read, in Indonesian and English: ‘Monument #40. Tsunami. 26 December 2004. Height of the water 4.50 m. Distance from beach 2.50 km. Arrival time of the wave, approximately 8.30 am (30 minutes after the earthquake. Magnitude: 8.9 Richter scale).’

Interestingly, none of reconstruction experts involved in making sense of the city nor other informants that I interviewed during the early phases of fieldwork had particularly noticed this particular type of monument or had ever heard of this project despite the number of them built across the city by the time I started to work in Aceh in 2006. Hirokazu Iemura, the spokesperson for this project, and a professor of earthquake engineering at Japan’s Kyoto University, explained that ‘tsunami victims seem to be hoping to forget about the disaster as soon as possible... [but]... They should learn to cope with the risks in their everyday lives, keeping in mind what happened there (sic)’ (Iemura and Pradono 2007). The Japanese government was reported to have spent 9.78 million yen (85,000 dollars at the time) to finance these memorials, which were approved by the Indonesian government and the Embassy of Japan in Indonesia. Their value, as educational monuments for disaster prevention, was very much in line with other disaster signage that indicates in the landscape of Greater Aceh where the tsunami risk area is demarcated, providing some indication of how much at risk of flooding each point is by referring to its topographic disadvantage (in relation to the closeness to and elevation from the coast). But this memorial, intended to have a heavily functional role, was nonetheless prone to being lost in translation across the landscape of reconstruction that featured an overbearing surfeit of new icons, rubble, and signage. Equipped with a detailed caption, they could be seen as memorials that are awaiting being found.

The thematic emphasis across tsunami memorials on risk aversion is related to the cultural context in which the tsunami catastrophe impacted the Aceh region. Environmental engineers, environmental archaeologists, and geologists working in this region since this time have argued that, even though there is historical scientific evidence that there had been in fact tsunami events, the widespread lack of awareness of this type of environmental risk prior to 2004 across the modern populations of Aceh can only be explained by a rupture in the transmission of this historical knowledge. This includes a lack of knowledge of the indicators that precede a tsunami event (a phenomenon that was hypothesized across many coastal regions of Southeast Asia), as well as an absence of appropriate life-saving responses to these indicators. In contrast, the argument has been made that the memory and oral history of tsunami events were preserved in



**Figure 3.** Tsunami *tugu*. Photograph by author.

other parts of the region in such a way that cultural responses to the early signs of a tsunami resulted in low casualties, as it was the documented case in the neighboring island of Simeulue (i.e. McAdoo et al. 2006). This contrast, and the unclear process of cultural transmission of past tsunami events that were documented in Aceh, suggests that a life-saving role awaits post-disaster cultural heritage – a heritage product that is *about* the documentation of past risks and casualties for future generations, not a heritage that *erases* damage through the act of preserving historic value alone.

One could challenge the life-saving capacities of a heritage of disaster by considering the relative failure of past efforts to use memorials and heritage sites to warn of possible dangers. Memorials that convey warning messages are widespread across the world, but one of the most relevant examples of this type of memorial are Japanese tsunami stones in the Pacific coast of Japan. In the aftermath of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami that affected the eastern coast of the island, Rob Moss and Peter Galison (2015) consider the disruption of safeguarding narratives that were meant to be contained and communicated across generations through an

intentionally curated post-disaster material culture. The ancient Tsunami Stones of Japan, they argue, were set in place by ancestors for the purpose of warning future generations of the risks involved in inhabiting certain tsunami-prone coastal areas. Hundreds of stones are laid across the coast of Japan, some as tall as 10 feet, bearing warning messages such as ‘do not build your homes below this point!’. In many cases, their engraved message is now gone, so they survive forgotten or ignored, their meaning lost to contemporary communities or superseded by more technocratic approaches to disaster preparedness. As Gallison and Moss argue, this is ‘a reminder of the way in which fundamental messages from humankind drift into obscurity over time’ (Galison and Moss 2015, 54). As part of a broader debate that seeks to identify the fate of disaster risk awareness within an acknowledgement of the temporal precarity of narratives, the present discussion asks – how do monuments communicate danger as a projection into uncertain futures and audiences? (Joyce 2016). In this sense, a heritage landscape of commemoration of and communication about ideas of resilience in anticipation of catastrophe imagines a long-lasting potential of memorials as carriers of cultural concerns and/or instructions for the future, but not without considering the loss of networks of meanings and interpretations that gave these memorials a specific purpose.

## Discussion and conclusion

It has been argued that it is important and productive to support improvisation in the way that monuments and heritage sites are re-used, re-interpreted and re-appropriated in future narratives to meet the needs of a changing society and allow the built environment to be articulated in narratives of resistance or re-description of cultural and social values (Rico 2016). However, in this discussion, I consider that the line between monument and ruin can be blurred when projected away from the design and inception of memorialized messages into the future at a certain cost to the usefulness of a memorial. I argue that detaching the narratives of origins from memorials as they are made to speak to uncertain future stakeholders and subjected to shifting narratives can have the result of losing their intended practical purpose in disaster preparedness, undermining their role as agents deployed in reconstruction processes of a ‘culture of disaster’ (c.f. Bankoff 2003) that may generate appropriate responses to various threats.

The large number of aid organizations working within such a short span of time as part of reconstruction processes in Aceh resulted in an intense and multi-agency process of construction and disrepair that was bound to leave a complex material legacy across the Aceh province. These efforts resulted in some of the ‘tsunami ruins’ across the landscape – now also a sort of heritage in need of preservation or maintenance. The decay (and the abandonment of care) of monuments that had been built precisely for the purpose of commemorating and raising awareness of the scale of a disaster and future risks associated with the conditions that led to a tsunami is not a problem unique to Aceh but suggests two main things to consider in the work and study of heritage preservation in post-destruction contexts. Firstly, it suggests that there is a process of trial-and-error involved in the construction of a lasting heritage for the future, where longevity is assessed not necessarily through its material remains but rather on the ability of the heritage product to convey a coherent message that preserves a use-value for the wellbeing of a society. Secondly, it suggests that there is not a clearly established framework amongst the methodological tools involved in the work of heritage preservation and critical heritage studies to examine these emerging but widespread forms of heritage and their purpose while preserving the potential ephemerality of their use and interpretation.

Despite a growing interest in the study of processes of heritagization as processes situated within historical, socio-cultural, political, and to some extent, spiritual contexts, there is an important absence in the practical work of heritage studies: the way that heritage value is simultaneously temporally bound and in flux (Harrison 2015; Holtorf 2015; Harrison et al. 2016; DeSilvey 2017). This methodological bias against the examination of temporal context in

the study of preservation practices and heritage value results in, amongst other things, an inability of the field to examine the aftermath of total loss of familiar landscapes as a window into the construction of heritage discourses and practices. What is lost, in this particular case, is the study of different forms of agency in the shaping of heritage and preservation narratives as these contribute to the construction of resilience in anticipation of recurring environmental risks. In this article, I pay attention to tsunami memorials as sources of information that act as companions to cultural heritage agendas and narratives, as well as objects that are subjected to discourses of heritage preservation themselves. These objects that are implicated in heritage narratives highlight the relative value of permanence over time and an associated issue of temporal translation of the messages that they contain. Monuments to disaster carry an additional burden for the work of critical heritage studies: is their role to ensure an uncorrupted transmission of a post-disaster message of survival, or is it to remain malleable to the same politics of interpretation that are prevalent in other objects of historical value? Is there a place in critical heritage debates to move beyond heritage as a victim to instead address the agency of heritage – agency with social and spiritual roles to fulfill beyond serving the purposes of the *longue durée*? If so, then a conversation about a ‘heritage of disaster’ may gain traction and constitute a productive legacy for growing discussions on the effects of climatic change on the natural and built landscape. Naturally, this calls for new forms of heritage preservation expertise that are able to navigate a challenging ontological ground that considers -but does not necessarily reconcile- multiple temporally-bound narratives and functions in the work of heritage preservation.

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