Orphans, Victims and Families:
An Ethnography of Children in Aceh

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Abstract

A long civil conflict and the 2004 tsunami left 80,000 children in Aceh without at least one of their parents. Orphanhood is a category both of childhood and suffering, which needs to be examined more closely. In this article, I tackle two issues: what constructs an orphan in the Acehnese post-catastrophe society and what institutionalised "orphans" actively do within and beyond their definition as such. More specifically, I consider some institutions called *panti asuhan*, "home for the care of the needy", as well as *dayah* or *pesantren*, Islamic residential schools that host orphaned and poor children.

I first describe what the idea of "orphanhood" conveys for the Acehnese I encountered and then turn to the dialogue between families and institutions using some specific cases. This will relate to practices and ideas of marriage and parenthood in a prevailingly matrilocal society, where single women (*janda*) are not an exception. The way children experience and shape the construction of affective ties through space and suffering is one of the recurrent themes. The conclusions highlight how the children's re-working of social and international categories such as orphanhood, victimhood and family collides with the social use of orphanhood as a highly valued social foundation.

Keywords: Indonesia, Orphans, Childcare, Attachment, Matrifocality, *Pesantren*

By 2009, after 30 years of civil conflict and a few minutes' tsunami 69,000 children in Aceh were fatherless, 7,000 motherless and 4,000 were missing both parents.[1] This constituted roughly 20% of the Aceh population aged between 0 and 19 (*Aceh dalam angka* 2008) and points to orphanhood as a

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1   See DEPSOS and Save the Children 2006 and 2007. Data collected through a network of semi-volunteer social workers. Sources in the Organisasi Konferens Islam added at least 40.000 more children.

somewhat normal condition for post-catastrophe Acehnese children[2].

Orphanhood is a category both of childhood and of suffering which needs analysing. On the one hand, because children's lives are always shaped by ideas of childhood, from their ability to work, their association with family, their autonomy to make decisions about where and how they live, to the ideas of normality, health and deviance that they live by (Allerton 2016). On the other hand, because by definition, an orphan is an archetypical suffering child, orphanhood evokes innocence, need, injustice, vulnerability and desperation and was repeatedly shown to be a highly meaningful social category both at the local and at the global level, playing an important role in humanitarian moral economy (Fassin 2004, Bornstein 2012). It's then relevant to question what this category reveals about the actual Acehnese orphaned children.

Research has long since shown that children, far from being passive receivers of their elders' categories, actively contribute to shaping theirs, as well as their elders', interpretation of the world. [3] If "childhood" is a collective process (Morton 1996, pp. 7-18), becoming an orphan, too, is more a process than a sudden shift of status. How do the children react to their metamorphosis, how do they bring it about?

In this article, I tackle two issues: what constructs an orphan in the Acehnese post-catastrophe[4] society and what institutionalised "orphans" actively do within and beyond their definition as such. More specifically, I consider some Acehnese "orphans" who, at the time of my fieldwork (2008-10)[5] were growing up in institutions called *panti asuhan*, "home for the care of the needy", as well as in *dayah* or *pesantren*, Islamic residential schools[6]. What-

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2   Children grow and disappear from statistics. Some of the children I met during my initial fieldwork in 2008-2009 are now parents (2016), and many more will be by the time this article is published. Ethnography of, and with children is necessarily related to a short period of time.

3   See James and Prout (1997) and James, Jenks and Prout (1998) for a fundamental discussion about theories of childhood and the challenges of deconstructing ideas of childhood. In the specific Indonesian case, Strassler shows how some children are trained to voice an interpretation of their times which becomes dominant through the mediatic use of the very idea of "child" (Strassler 2006); Beazley and Stodulka have underlined specific declinations of street-children's agency and forging of cultures.

4   Catastrophe" is a general word used to designate massive distruction and death, and literature often uses it to describe the Acehnese double disaster of war and tsunami. Although of course the differences in origin, deployment, management and consequences between the two are huge, the same society has been processing them at the same time.

5   This article stems from 3 months fieldwork carried out in and around Banda Aceh and Bireuen in 2008-2009, followed by 2-month stays in 2009 and 2010.

6   *Pesantren*, the place where the *santri*, the students, are, is the Indonesian word for a quite wide typology of residential Islamic school for both boys and girls. *Dayah* is the Acehnese term, but Acehnese *dayah* have a different tradition compared to the rest of Indonesia. While speaking Indonesian, the children often use the term *pesantren*. They also refer to their

ever their structure and ideological frame, they were all entirely or partly funded by charitable fundraising therefore the influence of aid money will be taken into account. My fieldwork has revolved around some of the afore-mentioned institutions, their boarders, their families and the groups they come from in Aceh Besar and Bireuen[7]. Although the article includes many adults' views, the root of my understanding comes from the ethnography with children between 7 and 18 years old[8], with a large majority in the 10-16 age span.

In the following pages, I first describe what the idea of "orphanhood" conveys for the Acehnese I encountered and then turn to the dialogue between families and institutions in some specific cases. This relates to practices and ideas of marriage and parenthood in a prevailingly matrilocal society, where single women (*janda*) are not an exception. The way children experience and shape the construction of affective ties through space and suffering is then one of the recurrent themes. The conclusions highlight how the children's re-working of social and international categories such as orphanhood, victimhood and family collides with the social use of orphanhood as a highly valued social foundation.

Children mean power, and Acehnese power

The massive destruction caused by the tsunami and the civil conflict elevated the level of attention Acehnese people pay to orphans (Samuels 2013, pp. 146-48). Helping orphans is unanimously acknowledged as a good, meritorious and dutiful action (ind. *pahala,* "that pays back") for a Muslim and orphans are an essential target of *zakat* ("charity" – one of the pillars of Islam, a right of the poor and an obligation of the rich). Most Acehnese know where orphanages and orphans are located in their town or area and in fact, on important occasions, it is a exceptionally common to offer food to the orphans or ask them to a *kenduri*, ("celebration banquet"), especially if the latter concerns children ceremonies, as if orphans were, beside a good chance to earn merit, also an auspicious presence.

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institution as to a *pondok*, the traditional bamboo hut where the students lived in the past. (Dholfier 1999; Day Howell, p. 200; Lukens-Bull 2001)

7   All the people's and the institution's names in this text are fictitious and are used with the sole purpose to help the reader identify the places and characters within the text.

8   I adhere to the global definition of child, which was very influential in post-tsunami recovery strategies. This does not mean that I take it face-value, downplaying the fact that "there is not one childhood, but many, formed at the intersection of different cultural, social and economic systems, natural and man-made physical environments" (Frones 1993, in James, Prout 1997, p. 2), and that while those I spent time with were treated and defined as children (ind. *anak*) many of the same age were already parents and workers.

At the time of my fieldwork, many of those who worked in *panti asuhan* ("homes") were volunteers, as beside one's duty as a Muslim, the willingness to look after orphans is more specifically seen as an Acehnese characteristic. "We, the Acehnese, we care for our children" people often said. Acehnese children were said to belong to Aceh and it was the *adat* (custom or tradition) not to fail them when they are in need. Children seemed to embody an idea of collective wealth, and the orphans looked like a shared resource transcending each kinship group.

It was a deeply embodied feeling. I was often told that the sexual power needed to generate children, too, was specifically Acehnese. As a 42 year-old single mother of six commented:

> You, in the West, are rich in goods (*harta*). We in Aceh are rich in children. Children are our wealth. Maybe you don't have the seed (*bibit*). Here men have very good seeds. And then we have sexual desire (*nafsu*).

In many women's words, children and the power of having children is what "other people" envy the Acehnese. Babies must be watched over more strictly than in other places as they could be kidnapped or something bad might happen to them. According to a 45-year-old single mother from Banda Aceh:

> "Everybody wants a child (…). A lot of non-Acehenese (*pendatang*) have settled here after tsunami [coming from other parts of Indonesia]. They were not pure victims (*korban murni*), they only wanted houses. Now they want Aceh children. But we love (*sayang*) our children, we the Acehnese. We have *adat*".

Fear of baby stealing, many women and men from Punge Blangcut (Banda Aceh) agreed, was there before tsunami but grew bigger after the catastrophe and engendered stories which to now, have hardly ever proved true (Samuels 2015). It was a deep threat to something essentially Acehnese. When people spoke with pride about the Acehnese's ability to look after their own children, they were always referring to Aceh as a meaningful territory. Most of the institutionalised children had left their home village and often also their region when they entered the institution, as the latter was chosen according both to a relationship network and the available opportunities. What matters, many parents and caretakers said to me, is that the child stay in Aceh. Bargach (2002, p. 85) reports that in Morocco it is often considered wrong that foreigners raise Moroccan children and similarly in Aceh, being raised by one's own people is ascribed to what one is entitled to by nature. In fact, the circulation of children across Acehnese institutions is a part of the Acehnese's identity process as finally,

children and fertility are related to ideas of an empowered collectivity and its territory. Backing an orphaned or a poor child in Aceh, then, is a point where Islamic duty and a wider, political idea of land and belonging overlap. An emotional and naturalised point, felt by each person as the power to engender as an Acehnese. Orphans are a cherished and embodied point of Acehnese identity[9].

Moneyless is fatherless

In Aceh, like elsewhere, well-off orphans tend not to be in orphanages, whereas poor children might be regardless of their parents' status. According to official reports, in 2006, 41% of the children in Acehnese *panti asuhan* actually had two living parents (DEPSOS 2006:53). Since their outset, the institutions I studied were intended for poor children, not only for parentless ones. Upon acceptance, a child was filed as *yatim* (fatherless), *piatu* (motherless), *yatim piatu* (father and motherless), but also as *fakir miskin* (poor) or *kurang mampu* (very low income) – which did not mean that the others were not poor. Despite such accurate categorisation, any child was seen as a sort of orphan after she has entered charity or charity-like *pesantren*. This is not specific to Aceh (Martin and Sudrajat 2007, p. 207) as the historical blurring between the orphan and the poor is neither recent nor limited to Asia (Fassin 2004, p. 125). Still, it is a powerful and confusing symbolisation.

More specifically, in common language, all the boarders of a *panti* or a *dayah* are *yatim*, "fatherless". "We invite the *fatherless"* (*undang anak yatim*), say, for example, those who hold a celebrating banquet. This is partly because that is the Islamic definition of the right target of charity; and partly, because it is very common to find single mother's (mainly widow's or divorcee's) children in institutions.

On a more symbolic plane, this attitude indicates that all the "charity children" (*anak kasihan*) alike are deemed to lack support in what is generally seen as a father's responsibility: money and education. Food, even in case of extreme poverty, can be usually provided for at home (whether the parent's or other family members' home) and the only orphans I met who may have starved but for their institution were those whose family and village had been heavily and repeatedly eradicated during the conflict.

Some *panti* resident's *fathers,* like Rizal, directly talk about their role:

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9   Bornstein relates of a similar attitude in India, where orphans are felt and dealt with as "children of the nation" (2012, p. 148).

Rizal, 46, is living in a *rumah bantuan*, ("humanitarian help house") with his wife. He badly broke his leg during the tsunami and never recovered, so he doesn't work.

"My daughter is in the *panti* and her younger brother would like to enter one. This *pesantren* I had picked out for him, I was refused. They say my son has a father, he is no *yatim*, but I am a father who does not have his function (*tidak ada fungsi*), like a ghost father (*kayak ayah djinn*). I can't give money, I can't buy clothes or motorbikes".

Siegel (1969, pp. 166-170) and Baihaqi (1974) have since long described how cash and clothes have come to be associated with a man's responsibilities in Aceh. But single mothers whose children are in institutions have turned towards the *panti* as a help and relief (Beazley 2015) beyond money. They consider that their need for support largely concerns education and the shaping of personality, which a woman cannot provide her children with:

Yuliana, 25, lost her husband right after giving birth in 2003, because of the conflict. She lives in Bireuen with her mother, her much younger sister and the latter's brand-new husband. She does odd jobs. She is considering the *panti* for her son.

"I work, and my mother is old. I have no father and no husband. This child needs to be looked after. Must be shaped. What then if I remarry? I don't mean now. Maybe next year. He must *ngaji* (learn to read the Quran). I don't have money for all that".

In the *panti* and in the two *pesantren* I worked with and in many others I have visited, the fatherly role of the institution was heavily emphasised. In *panti*, with one exception, the director, or the chief-carer, was always a man who was married and learned in Islam. In the *pesantren* or *dayah*, the leader of the community, the *tengku*, was called *abi* (Arab for "father"). As Luken-Bulls (2001, p.364) argues, in Indonesian *pesantren* at large, the father/son-like relationship between the boarders and the founder is fundamental. Conversely, I highlight that the idea of a mother/son equivalent is totally absent[10]. Although the *tengku's* wife was also called *ummi* (Arab for "mother"), she did not have, in the examples I studied, a full responsibility in the community. Other women were present in *pesantren*

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[10]   According to Siapno (2002, p. 71), the recent tendency in Acehnese Pesantren is to exclude even *ustaza*, learned women, from any direct responsibility towards the *santri*; besides, "the problem" of female leadership in Islam at large is a subject of a vast debate in Indonesia as well as in Aceh (Srimulyani 2013, Israh 2016; Kloos 2016).

and *panti*, especially when it came to institutions for girls, but they were teachers, required to be expert in one of the main school subjects (Islam, maths Arab and Indonesian) and they were there "to help study and direct (*mengarah*) the girls," as one of them said in a *panti*. This can be seen as a fatherly role even when performed by a woman. At home, the same care-taker said she relied on her husband's advice when it came to direct their children, because he "knew more". I then asked what happened when a girl in the *panti* began menstruating. She said that so far, incredible though it might seem, in a residence with girls between 10 and 15, she had never faced the question. The girls "already know from their elders" and had to look after themselves. When her own daughter comes of age, though, she explained, she will "of course," teach her what to do and see that she doesn't get scared.

The fact that being in an institution for "orphans" was talked about and dealt with as lacking a fatherly role was also confirmed by children being considered eligible for institutions only after they "no longer needed their mother," around the age of 6 or 7. This is when they have to start rising for morning prayer (*subuh*) so it is connected to the beginning of Islamic education. In fact, babies and small children are never handed to an institution; as two women who took their dead neighbour's small child into their home said, before that age a child clearly needs a mother and there is surely someone who wants him or her.

Such are the dynamics underlying the relationship between families and institution: mothers needing the role of a father. Of course, this echoes Siegel's seminal description of the boys' movement from a motherly realm, "home", to a fatherly, Islamic guide enabling manly brotherhood (Siegel 1967, pp. 150-53); except that it concerns both boys and girls, and that some mothers' life strategies, notwithstanding their words, also show a different picture.

Motherly landscapes

Returning to what Acehnese "matrifocality"[11] means when related to orphans and children in institutions, and what it is interpreted to mean in some discourses concerning orphans. Siegel (2000, p. 138-143) and Jayawardena (1977) have described how varying degrees of matrilineal heritage of houses and fields, associated with traditions of masculine mobility and

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11   I carried out fieldwork in Aceh Besar and Bireuen, not in the Gayo highland or the Tamiang region where the social structure is quite different. In the *panti* and *pesantren* I worked with, there were some children from those regions but not really in a significant number. It would be very interesting to compare the two experiences.

migration, result into a residential organisation in "women's clusters", that is, houses or groups of houses where sisters, sometimes maternal aunts and cousins and, occasionally, sisters in law, live in close contact with their children or youngsters[12]. When dealing with institutionalised children, I have run into many such groups in Banda Aceh, in Aceh Besar and in Bireuen area regardless of the importance of either conflict or tsunami in a given household.

In women clusters or in women-lead homes, women have long since developed autonomous strategies to enable their children to go to school and move on in life. Like in other parts of Indonesia (Van Reenen 2000), a womanly home is by no means a separated, relationless, or even manless domain, which requires a justification (Blackwood 2006, p. 83).

Here is one example out of many. I visited a small community in Punge Blangcut (Banda Aceh) after being acquainted with two children from that village in a privately run *panti*. The population of this group of houses, all tsunami *rumah bantuan*, was largely composed of "divorcees or husbandless women and widows" (*janda*), or of remarried couples, and of their children. Punge Blangcut *janda* tried in any way possible to empower their children. If one of them could make it to a *panti* or a cheap *pesantren*, they thought it a good thing. If he could not, they thought of an alternative: maybe a richer relative, a scholarship or some other help. Nur, mother of five, her third husband declared dead, pointed out that she and her family were no worse off now than before tsunami. Her own mother had been a *janda;* some of her own brothers and sisters grew up with relatives (her sister) and in a *pesantren* (two brothers). For Nur, the knowledge of how to deal with children whilst they are growing up without a resident father was instilled in childhood and she managed to be quite creative in her attempts. Of the two children of hers who were brought to a *panti* after tsunami, only one was a real orphan: Nur's third husband simply went away and she took the chance of tsunami to declare him dead. Nur said that thanks to this trick, this child entered a *panti* as he was entitled to the orphan's grant and could face minimal expenses. Now, she said, she wouldn't mind remarrying.

As in Nur's compound, in such a motherly/womanly landscape it was not uncommon for a child to grow up without a father present and it was by no means extraordinary for a child that his or her mother had a new partner. Many of the fatherless children I have met said they resented their mother's marriage more than they actually did. When they started telling

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12   Siapno (2002, p.28; 2003, p.150) talks of such clusters as *kampung janda*, as "villages of widows", and relates them to the conflict but it would be more correct to talk of villages of single women as a *janda* is a woman who was married and has either been separated from her husband by death (*cerai mati*) or by human will (*cerai hidup*) (Parker 2016).

stories about their last holiday home, for instance, they looked excited and most often, they talked, if not of their "new dad" (*yah moh*), about the "new baby" (*adik baru*) in terms of love and affection. Many widows said that they waited before remarrying because they cared (*kasihan*) for their children while they are small; actually, some of them waited until the child would be somehow ready to be, should it be necessary, temporarily handed to a relative or to a *pesantren*.

Often, mothers' relationships to their institutionalised children were very strong in spite of the separation and the children acknowledged that. The possession of a house played an important role in this dynamic between mothers, institutions (or better off relatives) and children, as it gave mothers a certain stability, like in Nur's story.

Yuliana, the "conflict widow" I mentioned before, said, of "tsunami widows", that it was easy for them to remarry because they all "got" (*dapat*) a house and a new man only had to walk in. What Yuliana pointed to is the appeal of marrying a woman with a house. Tsunami humanitarian help has actually provided many mothers who did not own a house – difficult women to choose for a marriage – with a property of their own, thus creating new possibilities for them. The presence of a post-catastrophe injection of money creeps in the subtlest sociocultural patterns.

Discourses on victims and children

On my first visit to a *panti*, the caretaker summoned the girls and called through the loudspeakers in the compound: "Tsunami and conflict victims are required to come to the *abi*'s office". As many girls gathered, the caretaker asked them: "What kind of victim are you? ("*Ini korban apa?*"). Those who were no "victim" defined themselves as "ordinary orphans" ("*yatim biasa*"), or "not victim of anything" ("*bukan korban apa-apa*").

Being a victim was a common category in post-catastrophe Aceh, so this doesn't add much to what is already known, that being classified as a victim was important in order to be entitled to some kind of financial help[13]. Even though the children seemed to use the word in a pragmatic way, the "non-victims" said they pitied (*kasihan*) the victims, that their stories were very sad (*sedih*). At the same time, as is unsurprising amongst teenagers concerned with the uniqueness of their suffering, many girls who told me their story insisted on it being the saddest ever (*paling sedih*). In this regard, "non-victims" said jokingly they always gave in (*kalah*) when comparing with the victims. Even within an institution, the children were quite aware

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13   For a more detailed analysis of the meaning of victimhood for the children of a specific *dayah* see Vignato 2012b.

of the double-sidedness of the status of official "victim": entitled to help, identified by misfortune. On one occasion, a few children surprised me by saying that their parents were the victims, not they. They were the orphans (*yatim*). Not all *yatim*: some *piatu*, some nothing at all. It didn't make any difference, they quickly added after claiming their differences, because they were all poor. It was a paying *dayah*, so one of them quickly stepped up and claimed in fact that only he and his two mates were really poor (*betul-betul miskin*). The others, those who came with a mattress, were rich and had money.

Another category of victims was used that did not figure in the official labelling. "They are victims of broken homes" (*Mereka korban broken-home*), said a caretaker of the non-tsunami, non-conflict victims. The role played by "*broken homes*" in institutionalising children has come up in many conversations I have had with caretakers and *tengku* as well as with officers and outreach workers from the Dinsos. In their view, "broken homes", that is, re-marriages after a divorce or a separation, are one of the main causes of the (for them) disgraceful children's placement in an institution.

Both the institutions and the welfare system, in fact, seem informed by an idea of the good Muslim marriage as is depicted by many voices of modern Islam (for instance Muhammadiya's *keluarga fakinah*, the "harmonious family", White 2006, pp. 284-86). In such ideal, divorce is seen as a catastrophic disruptor ("breaking up" a home). In Aceh, though, divorce is a common practice with far less disastrous consequences on the financial state of wives/mothers than in other, more sharply patrilineal and patrilocal societies. Married women tend to own their house and to live close to their mother's home or, in case of young married women, even live with their mother and other family members. So divorce does not necessarily imply rejection from a household[14].

Modern Muslim humanitarians, both Indonesian and foreign, hold certain opinions about Acehnese traditional relationships between men and women. An Indian leader of an important Muslim international humanitarian agency, for example, talked at length about Acehnese women's boldness in courting and trying to seduce married men (like him), and how this caused so many children to be – in his words – abandoned or neglected. He also described Acehnese men as irresponsible and unreliable[15]. Another *pengasuh*, a young woman, said that in Aceh, men *cerai kampung*, "divorce

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14   Quite acutely, Parker (2016) observe that stigmatisation of divorce and *janda* is more likely to occur in middle class, "housewife-married-to civil servant" kind of social environments rather than in poorer ones, regardless of the ethnic social organisation and kinship systems.

15   Peletz has described at length the genesis of ideas and practices of masculine "laziness" for the Negri Sembilan Malays (1996, p. 111).

in the village way". That is, they just disappear. That, in her eyes, was a big problem[16].

The common tropes that the institutions used to explain the dynamics of orphanhood in Aceh suggest that orphans are victims whether they survive a disaster, a war or the end of a parental agreement; in the last case, their divorced mothers are either victims of impious men or bold, seducing, uncaring creatures. Poverty suddenly fades into the background. I am not saying that this is an outspoken or official judgment, but that such stereotypes linger in the children's self-perception. As we saw, they learn to conflate their condition of poverty with both orphanhood and victimhood, thus erasing and being denied the various backgrounds that brought them to each specific institution. At the same time, they engage with these notions and turn them into original categories. These represent categories of entitlement – who has the saddest story, of social discernment – the difference between being a victim and being poor and even of refusal of and differentiation from the adults – the adults were the victims, not them. As we shall see in detail, the children use the institution as only a part of their affective and cognitive development.

"The system": rules and learning

Let's turn to institutions themselves. In fact, a *panti* differs from a *pesantren* as it does not have a founder who is learned in Islam, a *tengku* in Aceh's terms, can be state-run and does not focus on Islamic learning. In practice, *panti* tend to resemble *pesantren* in their structure, if not in their origin and funding. So much so, that an officer from Depsos has underlined the need to try to separate the two institutions (see also Depsos… 2006 and Beazley 2015). It is difficult to fathom what this can imply: in a society now officially ruled by Syariat, even state or other private institutions are thoroughly animated by religious principles[17].

The confusion is certainly there for the boarders. Many children I spoke to said a *panti* is a *pesantren* for free. Besides, all the other specificities that are known to make the difference between *panti* and *dayah* do not correspond to the facts I have uncovered in the field.

The *pesantren* I have worked with did not have all levels of education within their compound and about half of their boarders, especially the old-

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16   I have detailed elsewhere how "village marriages" (*nikah kampung*) are being transformed in Aceh (Vignato, 2012a).

17   In 2012, the difficulty to infuse Syariat-inspired charity institutions with contrasting pedagogic principles has been openly presented to me as one of the main obstacles to new policies in a conversation with the Dinsos in-charge officer.

er ones, went to a public school outside, like the *panti* boarders. Also, the children said that in a *pesantren* one *ngaji* (receives religious education) a lot and one learns both to read Arabic and the Quran, but this, they also do in *panti asuhan*, even though not in the idea of becoming, at the end of the education, a *tengku* (in Aceh, the Islamic authority). Similarly, the girls underlined that in a *pesantren* you cannot wear trousers or shapely clothing and have to wear "proper" Islamic dress, but most *panti* actually required the girls to have the same outfit as in *pesantren.*

Even as far as payment is concerned the *pesantren* and the *panti* I have worked with were overlapping in their requirements. Those addressing the "orphan" issue were not "*pesantren* for the rich"[18], and the boarders were classified according to the categories above mentioned for the *panti* plus "normal" boarders, paying an established fee. In the Dayah Darutthalibin, a *pesantren,* started by its founder as a tsunami orphans institution and thus consequently funded, most of the children were actually paying a very low monthly rate (100,000 Rp from the real orphans, 200,000 from those who have both parents, if they can afford it; about €7 to €14) or, in very few cases, nothing at all until 2010 (the end of public funding). This is what feeding the child would cost at home even in the poorest conditions. Near Bireuen, a *Panti Asuhan/Pesantren* – in its own terms – run by Muhammadiyah, had both paying and non-paying boarders; in Banda Aceh, the Dayah Rasyad Aziziya, designed by its founder as a specific conflict orphan institution, had only non-paying boarders but it was planned to be so only until 2013. Much as the Dinsos wished things to change, one thing is clear: the money stemming from international aid helped the Acehnese implement not only the rescue, but also the conceptual framing of post-catastrophe institutionalised "orphan" as disciples of an Islamic expert.

Even the functioning of *panti* and *pesantren* was similar. As the 32-year old leader of Dayah Darutthalibin put it, there is "a system" enabling a *dayah* of 300 children to be run by a few resident caretakers – actually none in his case as the only adults who stayed within the dayah, besides him, were the teachers. A *dayah* is structured according to the ideology of "*kakak-adik*", "older/younger sibling": the older one looks after and controls the younger, and this, in turn, acknowledges his/her authority. Such ideology of brotherhood/sisterhood is largely acknowledged in both *pesantren* and *panti* throughout Indonesia (Dhofier 1999, pp. 4-25, Lukens-Bull 2001, p. 360; Martin and Sudrajat 2007, p. 249). In practice, each dormitory has a leader (*pemimpin kamar*) amongst the oldest girls or boys who is respon-

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18 It must be underlined that the historical habit to send children to be educated at a *tengku*'s place has developed, in Aceh, into a boarding school culture. Some of these are quite exclusive, and expensive, like the Turkish owned Fatih Bilingual School in Banda Aceh.

sible for the younger ones, who deserves and actually has their respect and obedience.

For "the system" to function satisfactorily, as it apparently did, the rules (*syarat*) of the institution were a vital frame. They were important both to the children and to the caretakers of *pesantren* and *panti,* and communicating them was one of the first things the caretakers did when we met for the first time. They partly corresponded to good Islamic attendance. The five prayers had to be performed regularly right after the call; the children had to study (go to school and learn the Quran) and pay respect to their elders and their leader.

More specifically, though, the rules aimed to educate the children as self-sufficient adults by limiting their pleasures and whatever pushed them back to their former state of childhood. As a caretaker said, in their institution "they have self-esteem," (*kita punya PD,* [acronym for *percaya diri*, self-esteem]), because they valued *mandiri*, "being able to stand on your own legs,", which is one of the overt goals of both *panti* and *pesantren* (Lukens-Bull, 2001, relates the pan-Indonesian joke of *mandiri* meaning *mandi sendiri*, "being able to bathe by yourself,"). The institution has inner independence as a goal, but it is required in children from the beginning.

The progress towards independence can be hard. The separation from families is usually painful. The *santri* or the residents in a *panti* were not allowed to return home more than once in a month or otherwise, the caretakers usually said, they would "get used to it and not want to come back again." At home one reverted to spoiled childishness, in theory (as the children idealised it, they could watch TV, be idle, have no duties…). The insistence on this point is somehow more symbolic than practical as anyhow, most children only went back once or twice in a year, not only for economic reasons as many parents simply did not allow them back more often. Besides, those whose homes I visited had no TV and no space for idleness[19]. Let's not forget, either, that unlike ordinary college or *pesantren* students, many did not have a reliable affective situation to go back to and on top of that, had lived through dramatic experiences.

The learning within and through the institution was informed by specific restrictions with precise targets. "You have to watch yourself" (*Harus jaga diri*) many girls and boys told me, and "cool down emotions" (*menejukkan emosi*) or "check your emotions" (*tahan emosi*)[20]. It is a deep process of inter-

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19   Martin and Sudrajat come to the conclusion that in the whole of Indonesia, the children living in an institution should have more frequent interactions with their original family (2007, p.31). So does Beazley, in a study directly commissioned by the NGO Save the Children (2015).

20   All the vernacular words I mention in this article are in Indonesian unless otherwise specified.

nalisation of control that the children, especially the teenagers, were aware of and, to a certain extent, proud of.

> When Sri, a 15-year-old boarder in the Dayah Darutthalibin, is confronted with breakfast consisting of dried fish and rice, she sighs and says, with exasperation: "See, Miss? This is what we get here every morning". Other girls join in. To my unprofessional, Western, spontaneous suggestion that they ask for a change – it is not a prison, the *tengku* is an open-minded young man, it would not be more expensive to vary the breakfast – Sri says, with a somewhat superior look: "Oh, you have to hold yourself (*tahan diri*). This is what you learn here. This is it".

The boarders couldn't have a mobile phone or an electronic or musical instrument. This concerned mature behaviour and becoming a specific kind of gendered and sexualised adult. Mobile phones in particular were seen as an open door for flirtatious behaviours, especially for girls. Much as they resented it, the children also adhered to this ideal. Among the education a youngster needs in order to become adult, proper gender behaviour was quite relevant. Because the girls were required to wear "proper" clothes, they learned that "all the body is forbidden" (*seluruh badan aurat*) and because they were forbidden to flirt in any way (*tidak boleh pacaran*) they learned that they are at risk. In *panti* H*, Vitriani, 15, was often punished because her voice, said the *pengasuh*, was rude (*kasar*). A woman's voice, a part of her body, is also *aurat* in Islam, and should be kept low and nice. In Dayah Darutthalibin, girls had to practice their devotional chanting refraining from reaching high peaks and trying to keep their body still, whereas boys were encouraged in practicing *likee*, Sufi chanting and trance like dancing. Unlike the boys, the girls – especially in mixed institutions – were not allowed any sports or games because, as two *tengku* have said to me, such activities would require facilities like an indoor gym, which are far beyond the institution's budgets, and it would not be proper for a girl to jump up and down before a man. In the *panti* and *dayah*, the idea of danger and sin associated to the female body being exposed to men went much further than in villages. In fact, beside the *tengku*, some men were always around the girls' compound (the teacher, the neighbour, a workman…); thus, unlike at home or in the village, the girls tended to be wearing a jilbab permanently, some even to sleep in it. The freedom of a little girl's body had to be restrained.

Finally, the *asuhan*, the "care" the *panti* and the *pesantren* alike provided was made of the rules, the respect and the devotion which were supposed to turn a child into a good adult, the latter being equated to a good Muslim in modern understanding. *Panti*, and all the more so *pesantren*, were not conceived as places where lonely children would grow up with the next best thing to a family-like psychological and affective environment; rather,

they were thought of as places where the young ones are deemed to grow up as fast as possible (Martin and Sudrajat 2007, p. 40-43). Beazley (2015) considers this as "inappropriate care" but this of course requires defining a standard of what appropriate care looks like.

This does not mean that there was no "love" (*cinta kasih*) in the ideologies of the institutions I dealt with. The people helping in the institutions said they did it because of the "*kasihan*" (a mixture of pity and love) they felt for the children or because they "*niat*" (have made a vow), and some of the *pengasuh* said that any punishment for those who break the rules was only a question of love ("*cinta kasih*"). But this "love" did not imply an affectionate behaviour. With some exceptions, the personal relationship – not the symbolic one – between the *santri* and *his/her* abi was not relevant. Abi often could not tell one child from another. As we shall see, love and affection were deemed to be inside the rules.

Being able to resist – wanting to be there: the children's view

As demonstrated in former paragraphs, children are heavily influenced by the categories that their elders build upon them, like the strategies of appropriation of international aid through victimhood or an education to a specifically designed practice of Islam. The influence extends to their feelings – or rather, is deeply rooted in them.

Most children I met, boys and girls alike, said the rules were very heavy (*berat*) to live by. Even though in most *pesantren* "*boleh nonton*", "you can watch TV", it was usually restricted. Schedules were very strict, even in the *panti* where it was believed that children need leisure. They had endless individual and collective tasks to perform.

Still, the "orphans" stayed at their *pondok* although they could easily escape. The *dayah* and *panti* had no rigid physical barriers separating them from the territory they were located in. The boarders were usually quite free to exit the compound, go to the small shops nearby, visit the neighbours, laze around whenever there was the time, especially the boys. They walked to school by themselves.

Why didn't they leave, given that mostly, it was not their choice to be there? Certainly, there was an idea of self-salvation. Most of the tsunami children were just brought by someone to a shelter after the general destruction. Similarly, many of the conflict orphans had been reported by some local *tengku* or officer as being particularly needy and were brought to the *dayah* after staying with a relation or in a local *dayah*; they came from the whole Aceh and were often rescued from situations on the edge of starvation, or beyond it.

"Normal" poor children had different stories. Although some of the pay-

ing boarders in Dayah Darutthalibin knew what they were in for and wanted it, for the majority it was an irreversible parental decision. In many cases, it was presented to them as a temporary solution so that they "could keep on going to school", so they said, while their parents remarried or found a job or solved other difficulties; research show that this very rarely happens (Martin and Sudrajat 2007, p.143).

Whichever the modes and the reasons of their arrival, many boarders explained to me, what is important is not whether one wants to enter a *panti,* a *pesantren* or a *pesantren*-like environment: what matters is whether one "bears" (*betah*) the life there. In many children's view, there were good reasons to try. In fact, there is something to be gained in an institution. By stressing the vital importance of comradeship, as it is expressed both in the *kakak/adik* and peer-to-peer relationships among those who share the same fate, the "system" structures a charge of love and affection that the children acknowledge:

> Liza is 8, her father was killed in the conflict and she was brought to the *panti* in Bireuen area by her grandmother after her very young mother remarried and had a new baby. In the afternoon, she starts sitting apart from the other children and finally breaks out in tears. She goes on crying loud for roughly one hour, sitting in a corner and burying her face in her hands but not leaving the room. After a while I ask the others what is happening to her. They say she is a newcomer, only six months, and has to go through it. They stop me from my impulse to go near her: they say that if you try to hug her or console her, she gets worse. "*Teringat kampung*" (she misses home), they say, it always happens when one arrives. Suddenly she comes back to the group and smiles. The older girls hug her and hold hands as she starts being playful.
> "Small children are like that," says Irfa, from Meulaboh area, a bilateral tsunami orphan. "They think their home is still there. The home is actually there (*memang kampung tetap di situ*), but they are better here," (*lebih enak di sini*) because "you can stick together with friends," (*ramai-ramai sama kawan*).

Of course, Irfa's thinking was sharp because her home was totally gone, but when other girls compared themselves to her they agreed that even though their situation at home was radically different, the *panti* was safer (*lebih nyaman*) than home and it was good to enjoy comradeship and "not be alone at home" (*daripada sendirian di rumah*).

The physical closeness that the girls lived through (I could never spend nights with the boys), sleeping in each other arms and sharing all vital space was described as "comforting" (*menenagkan, menghiburkan*). One can actually be happy at the *pondok*, it was maintained, and most children I met – by no means all – and grew close to, looked and sounded healthy and

lively[21]. Such feeling can be interpreted as a learned love for what oppresses, Foucault's "delicious punishment" (1976, p. 161); this, though, would deny both the parents, or the families, and the children a certain right to choose and organise their life as they consider best, and be satisfied with their choice.

Strikingly, the strength and the sweetness of the social bond created within the mutual friendship of the *pondok* is inextricably intertwined with the growth in knowledge of Islam. The mixture of knowledge and comradeship enables one to grow up and leave his or her state of ignorance – being a *kampung* kid – and go towards adulthood and autonomy. For many teenagers, personal themes related both to the dead relatives and their own future found expression in Islamic daily practice.

> During prayer, 15-year-old Darfiyanti says, she sometimes remembers her dead mother and cries like a child, but then she "only thinks of Allah and she is calm".

> "Here I feel safer," (*lebih terjaga*) says Ade, 15, the youngest of 5 with sick parents, two brothers dead in the conflict. "I do not get influenced from outside," (*terpengaruh dari luar*). "When you go to school outside, maybe you start smoking, or you drink, or you become naughty (*nakal*)".

The fact that Islam was considered not only the general horizon for any aspect of life, but more specifically the condition for an affective relationship dawned on me when the children I have grown closest to expressed their affection for me by inviting me to enter Islam or by simply taking for granted that I was a Muslim. Sri (15), Hana (12), Linda (16) said that they were sad that they would not be able to meet me in heaven after death[22]; Ata (14), Saifudin (13) and other boys from the Dayah Rasyad Aziziya could just not believe that I was not a Muslim, since I was so normal, so much "like a human being" (*macam manusia*).

Finally, the children were lead to desire the fatherly rules, which their families could not provide them with. Both boys and girls felt that they could

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21   Martin and Sudrajat make the same remark for the whole of Indonesia (2007, p. 309) but Beazley (2015) questions this impression. In my opinion, the first remarks that the children make, aligning with Beazley's research, find a more complex interpretation once the reciprocal knowledge deepens.

22   I have tried to understand whether this attention to the afterlife was related to children's direct experience of massive collective death, but as far as my experience could go, it rather depended on the teachings they received about the importance of the future paradise in your life's behaviour than to an elaboration of the actual experience of death. Many children insisted on the difference, in Indonesian, between *mati*, to die, and *meninggal*, to depart (from this world). Only the Muslim, for them, "leave this world"; the others, in the children's view, brutally die like animals.

grow up thanks to their institutions and thanks to Islam. At their core, these institutions were helping them by transforming them according to a project of new society. In this regard, Michael Feener (2015) speaks of "social engineering" when considering how the implementation of the Islamic Law has come to structure all long-term planning in Aceh. As we have seen, affections and emotions were fundamental in the process.

Once the affective bond is acknowledged, it must not be understated, either, that institutions were quite strict in their enforcement of the rules and that punishments, often bodily punishments, for trespassers were always inscribed in a moral judgment. In Dayah Darutthalibin, every evening, the boys were summoned and made to stand in a line. Those who were going to receive punishments were called to the front. The older boys and the *tengku* walked around with wooden sticks and some of the culprits would be hit, others dispatched around doing collective chores (cleaning, helping in the kitchen etc.). The practice was called "*makamah*" (tribunal), and the boys and girls considered it both as a good thing and a dreadful experience. If one sticks by the law, many children said, one does not get punished – of course, they also complained a lot about unjust elders and undeserved punishments, but not of the system itself. The worst, according to what they said, was being ashamed by the *tengku* in front of other residents[23]. The girls in Dayah Rasyad Aziziya said their *ustaza* often hit them, but only rarely made a public show of it, and they, too, agreed it was better. Certainly, in spite of the threat some children openly challenged the institutions. In Panti H*, a group of girls were constantly making up plans to meet up with boys or set up fights about watching TV or start problematic actions, like go jogging on a Sunday morning at dawn ("Where in the Quran does it say it's forbidden?" argued Vitriani). Years later, they told me that they hated their carers but did not despise their ideas. In a *dayah* the *tengku* admitted that he had a few difficult boys but he would never administrate punishment in ways that left permanent marks. Both the targeted boys told me, only half laughing, that much though they respected him and felt they deserved their punishment, they thought that he was false (*bohong*), a hypocrite (*munafik*) and a thief (*pencuri*), not because he used violent corrections or the system didn't work but because he was always singling them out. In other words they, like the girls, blamed the people but not the principle.

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23   Martin and Sudrajat (2007, p. 245) show that this is a regular practice in the whole of Indonesia. Beazley underlines that in the pesantren she studied, punishment could be very harsh.

Outside and after the institution

Anyhow, if a child was a recidivist trespasser, he or she was sent back. Fatherly institutions can do what a father cannot do, that is, eliminate a problematic child. When no punishment succeeded in bringing a child back to the rule, his or her *wali*, legal representative, was summoned and asked to take the child back. This is why, a *tengku* explained to me, he never accepted children who do not have a clear *wali* he could relate to.

When I met two boys (14 and 15) from Bireuen area who were sent back, respectively, from a *panti* and from a *pesantren*, they had completely given up the idea of "*cari ilmu*", (becoming learned): they had stopped attending school and stayed around their mother's compound doing odd jobs. While in the institution, they both said they missed "pocket money" (*peng jajah*, in Acehnese) that, for most children, is the concrete symbol of a motherly indulging attitude. They wanted to go back to their mothers. However, if by supposedly regressing to a childish state, they had given up a clear and dominant project of manhood and adulthood, this does not mean that they would not make up another one. One of the two, who was staying with an extremely poor grandmother, said that if he had the money, he would emigrate to Malaysia, displaying more of an adult attitude than any of his former *pesantren* peers. By contrast, the many girls I met whom had left *pesantren* and *panti*, especially if under 16, had a slightly different attitude, as they just melted back into the home's tasks, or so they said. In fact, many of them tried to make a living as self-supporting workers in town, (see Vignato, forthcoming). Out of the six I met, only one had no longer attended school; she was waiting for a migration permit.

In this regard, it must be remarked, the institutions I visited did not emphasise concrete life projects. The children voiced standard ideals (policeman, nurse, Islamic expert) but in fact, most had no plans at all. The institution held them in place and busied them with acquiring adulthood and yet, paradoxically, by engaging them to leave infancy behind them, it turned them all into an ordered hierarchy of younger and older *children*. In spite of their renunciation to the fatherly institution dispensing knowledge, the two boys who returned home immediately started working, which is, in every Acehnese contemporary eyes, an adult performance. By adapting to life within the institution, which was no mean feat, those who had a choice were also deciding that they wanted to be children for a longer time. They embraced a globalised idea of long childhood, although a quite independent one where a child looks after herself.

Motherless children in matrifocal societies

So far, I have pointed to what, in the orphanages and the *pesantren* I studied, made the children equal. I am now going to present some obvious differences, which weighed heavy in the children's institutionalised life.

In the first place, a child who has actually lost her mother (ind. *piatu*) needs attention and a specific focus that the institutions I worked within could not provide her with. Psychological counselling, whatever its use in relieving an orphan's grief, was only considered in one *panti* I worked in. Episodes like Liza's crying certainly teach a child to treasure her community, but do not help those who for some reasons cannot receive that teaching. For example, in Dayah Darutthalibin, 10-year-old Aulina, whose mother was slaughtered during the conflict, hardly uttered a word. The other girls spoke of her in terms of pity. "Poor thing, she's traumatised!" (*kasihan*, *dia bertrauma*), they said, once more picking up adults' interpretation of aid categories of suffering. Aulina slept curled in a corner, untouched by others. "If you touch her," explained a girl of her age, "she screams." She added that she thought that she might have been raped, as older girls said that raped girls behaved like that – which also signifies that they had experience of other girls being in the same condition and that rape was a known idiom. The following year, the *tengku* was very worried because Aulina's *wali* didn't respond to his pleas to take the girl back. In my last visit to the *dayah*, in 2014, Aulina, who never even completed primary school, was said to have been picked up by some people from her village (*orang kampung*).

When the individual loss is seen in its social frame, the fragility of a motherless child in Aceh takes on an additional shade. Unlike fatherless children, who fall into a consolidated social experience – women's household dealing with the absence of fathers and sometimes causing it – motherless children linger in a far less steady situation. Out of the 10 motherless children I spent some time with, only one, a girl, returned to an unmarried father's house; among the others, two went back unwillingly to their married father's home and the rest, either stayed in the *panti* or would spend time in a grandmother's or, more often, another female relative's house. Unlike *janda*, who often wait until their children are older than six or seven, most widowers, whatever their age, remarry rapidly.

Concurrency between daughters and stepmothers is acknowledged in literature about orphans; Merolla (1993, p.182) connects it to the place of a woman in patriarchal structures and so does Jourdan in this focus. In Aceh, the concurrence happens on a different plane. Often, men move into women's houses, especially at remarriage, and find it hard to bring along their adolescent daughters. If a newlywed moves into her husband's house – the most frequent case is that he obtained a *rumah bantuan* – it's even more awkward, as that would have been the daughter's own house. Vitriani,

Daud's daughter, the "wild" teenager I already spoke about, her mother dead in the tsunami, said her step-mother was crazy (*gila*) and should go back to her own home with the baby she expected; the latter thought Vitriani ought to respect her position in the house and obey. Vitriani was no longer allowed home.

Motherless children also had a less smooth time than the other children within the *panti* and *pesantren*, as Aulina's example pointed out. Interestingly, many young motherless children I met in institutions were the orphaned children of an orphaned mother; the maternal line itself was weak, and that, together with adversities, was one of the reasons why they had been brought there at such a young age.

"Conflict orphans": seeking a personal identity through past differences

Another significant difference among the orphaned children was determined by what caused their parents' death. Unlike the tsunami children, who participated in an acknowledged simultaneous tragedy, those who suffered loss because of the conflict were usually born into a situation torn by a general violence encompassing the single acts that they experienced individually. Not only had they witnessed and experienced atrocities, but their families and neighbours also had and over an extended period of time (Good, Del Vecchio, Grayman 2006, 2007, 2009). Most of those I met had been separated from whatever family they had at an early age, if only for safety reasons, but often also in order to be enabled to eat and go to school, and had spent time either in a local *dayah* or with some other relations. In both *panti* I visited in Bireuen area, the majority of the "conflict" children, both orphans and with living parents, had missed one or more years of school.

With one exception, which I shall describe, all the institutions I have dealt with made no difference in handling "ordinary" orphans (including children with living parents) and the victims of violence and this, not only because they faced multiple emergencies. As an officer of the Dinsos said, there was a projectual intention in not making the "conflict victims" feel special or particularly unlucky, but to take advantage of their luckier mates' happier experiences. This can be seen as a variation on the trust in mutual aid intrinsic to the *kakak/adik* system and does not come in contrast with the administrative status of victim that I mentioned before. It also points to the idea that erasing memories through the practice of Islam, emptying the mind while filling it only with the thought and the sound of God, is a viable method to handle traumatic experiences (Vignato 2012b).

As far as this mingling conflict and non-conflict orphans is concerned,

Dayah Rasyad Aziziya was an exception[24]. In its founder's project, it was set up specifically to assemble children whose parents had been killed during the conflict so as to foster peace amongst them. Being a "conflict orphan" did not mean the same thing for everyone. Amongst the some thirty children I spent time with in the *dayah*, about a half had lost one or both parents by an unknown hand; a quarter were the resistant army's (GAM) combatants' children; and the remaining were the resistant combatants' victims.

What showed in a clear-cut way in the Dayah Rasyad Aziziya sheds an interesting light on dynamics concerning all poor children *dayah* and *panti*. The boys themselves claimed their specificity of war orphans: as some of them told me, they were interviewed by the Indonesian television because they were so special, and a group of them also got the chance to go to Japan in order to do a *silat* (Indonesian martial art) demonstration (again, the role played by international aid money is always relevant in these matters). In the *tengku*'s words, Islam and *silat*, embodying tradition, would enable the children to be peacefully together notwithstanding the origin of their orphanhood. They were exemplary, mediatised orphans. Emboldened by their official acknowledgement, the boys spoke with ease about their past experiences, bypassing more complicated attitudes surfacing in their behaviour (restlessness, hostility, silence).

> Two conflict mother orphans aged 7, Boi, a witness of his mother's and baby brother's slaughtering when he was three, and Hasan, who didn't know what happened to his parents after they were abducted, approached me spontaneously. Boi mentioned his mother and what happened to her (he was pulled away from her so they could rape and kill her) with a certain pride. The other boys approved of his attitude. Boi carried scars all over his body. An elder said he was very unmannered (*kasar*) and forever starting fights; for that reason, he also often got punished. Boi boasted about being a GAM officer's son, the best known and most powerful of all officers. He could detail his father's degree and exact responsibilities in the army and when he did, other children joined in with theirs. Aside from the killing scene, Boi's knowledge could hardly come from direct witnessing and memories, as he was too small before his father was killed; his GAM father's story was already the object of a collective narration and interpretation.
> Hasan, on the contrary, after listening to Boi's overwhelming talks, quietly drew my attention to the fact that his mother had also been raped and killed, and shifted into a silent stillness which was commented upon by the other boys as "*biasa*!" (normal). During another meeting, Hasan, urged by other boys, alternatively said he remembered his grandmother or maybe mother, but seemed very confused. The older boys said they pitied him for that. Some

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24   For a further analysis of the effects of the system of this *dayah* onto the children's traumatic memories, see Vignato 2012b.

of them underlined that he must be ashamed of remembering that his father was killed by GAM as he was "helping the Indonesian Army" (*bantu TNI*). He was a traitor.

In this way, and in spite of the *tengku*'s good intentions, the *kakak/adik* "system" reinforced prejudices and put children who were already suffering in a more difficult position: the elders passed on knowledge of differences rooted in their parents' positioning in the conflict. They integrated the external images of themselves (the heroic and combative children of heroic combatants put on a showcase in Japan thanks to international aid money) to negotiations of their self-image made within the *dayah*.

The girls in the *dayah* were not submitted to a specific peace program – which underlines the different entitlement to power for male and female in *dayah*. In separate conversations, a few of them reported having a very hard time because of the way their past was reframed in the present. For example, some of the girls thought that Hayatul (15) was crazy and evil with her black magic, and avoided her in all ways. They said she was a boy, violent and strong: not *like* a boy, an actual boy, which was why, in their opinion fairly, she often got punished. They accused her of stealing, an accusation I often heard in both *panti* and *pesantren*, where no privacy existed and the children owned very few objects. Stealing is also a very serious offence in the popular understanding of Islamic legal thought.

> Hayatul was anxious to talk privately. She complained that the other girls shamed her because she was poor and had no family to go back to, whereas they were "rich and spoiled". Because her home and village had been destroyed, she was a few years behind in school. She had a difficult relationship with the other girls and her own "unfeminine" ways: while in the school courtyard, she said, she only spent time with younger boys because "they leave her in peace" and she could sell them whatever she had. She told different, fairy-like versions of her violent past (her mother killed by a neighbour who accused her of being an Indonesian Army officer's lover / killed by a djinn she had "picked up" while walking by a cemetery; her father and brother killed under her eyes while she was bound and probably raped / her grandmother flying over the farm, the time spent wandering "in the woods" and meeting an old enchanted lady) and often talked of a sister or of a brother as being the only ones who cared for her. Switching to a different paradigm, she sometimes said that she hated them as well as her mother's mother who sent her away. Hayatul hated being in the *dayah* but was terrified she would end up on the streets if she were ejected.

Other girls in the *dayah* had similar stories, although they reacted in a range of different attitudes, less scary than Hayatul's. Heny (12), for example, laughed a lot and although other girls said she was strange, they

admired her for not crying over herself; her family had been slaughtered and her house burnt down, so she was displaced and ended up in the *dayah* with her sister. Ready to start games and drag other girls into all sort of action, Heny never talked about her past and was not doing well in school – she could barely read and could not come up with a proper sentence even when speaking. I learned her story from her younger sister Rosi, aged 10. Rosi could not remember when the peace had started, did not know much of the tsunami and had no memory of the murderous events in her family; she was jealous of what Heny knew – at least she remembered their mother's face, she said. Rosi was often punished for her laziness and tendency to sleep through days.

On the whole, suffering children were heavy to be integrated into the *kakak/adik* system. They were the disturbing ones and, as the *tengku* himself said, the most difficult were the ones whom he could not send back as there was nowhere they could go back to, so the weakest. Finally, in spite of the "system" trying to level out differences in the name of a global ideology of age-based respect and teaching, and in spite of the pedagogic intentions put forward by the Dinsos officers, the children, among themselves, were hanging onto those very differences as a source of personal identity even when they put them into trouble. Boi got punished, Hasan was mistreated by peers, Hayatul was affirmative in her un-womanly behaviour and was both feared and despised (and punished), Heny embraced a jolly mutism, Rosi separated from the others in a depressive attitude.

These extreme cases enlighten many others I came across. Independence was an idea that did not hold the same meaning for all and was not simply constructed through weaving new comradeship while turning a well-wishing and thankful eye to one's parents or home. While it is impossible to refuse Islam in Aceh without renouncing a deep layer of one's personality, children like Boi, Hasan and Hayatul fought a way out of that ideal religion they were summoned to embody: the boys claiming violence as their resource, Hayatul breaking the standards and playing with gender and an irregular magic world.

Conclusion

In this article, I have spoken of what seems to be considered as a fatherly function and as a motherly function in Aceh as seen through the prism of the institutionalised "orphans", and of the way parents, especially mothers, interact with charity or educational institutions in order to look after their children. I have underlined how the institutions tend to find their place in a dynamic between a traditional matrifocality, the emergency to face collective catastrophes and the changing horizon of Islam. I have also described

how the form of love and affection, which stems from the *pesantren*-like institution, can relate differently to the loss of a father and of a mother, and to the different individual and historical situation.

One of the first theoretical conclusions I will then draw concerns how the children view themselves as members of a family even though they are in an institution, and thus develop a subjectivity which is only partly shaped by the institution itself through acceptance or resistance. Moving children around is not, in Aceh, not until recently at least, a sign of indifference or abandonment. It was, rather, part of a woman's, especially a single woman's, strategies to grant her children education, both in Islam and in school. It was also a way to help them re-join a fatherly world where a man is in charge and the children are not attended to. The impoverished or orphaned children whom I met in the institutions moved from this cultural and affective pattern and not from an ideal where all the children live in an individual house with their father, mother and siblings. In the *tengku*'s words, all the children were in his *dayah* right because someone outside cared for them. Unlike in Bornstein's Indian experience (2012), although conceptualised as orphans, the Acehnese children in institutions were never seen as unkinned, on the contrary. They, themselves, opposed fiercely that feeling as they ceaselessly built on imaginary and real ties to homely people and places. Imagining fathers was a relevant aspect, especially for the conflict orphans, as a difference exists between a fatherly function and a father.

A second theoretical conclusion concerns the dangers intrinsic to institutions where experienced, physical affection and love are supposed to be only amongst peers, like in adult life. The whole institutional functioning of the charity childcare that I examined relies on the internalisation of an age-based ideology. Children with collective or individual dramatic experiences were left to their own devices, summoned to grow up rather than provided with reassuring alternatives to parental or anyhow, affectionate, vertical adult-child relationships. When precocious autonomy and independence are exacted, those who have not, so far, acquired enough strength to "speed up" the process appear as the really marginalised ones. The institutions do not provide figures of attachment, on the contrary, they conjure them. The older brother/sister who is in charge is in a (paradoxical though it might seem) hierarchy among peers, and is bound to disappear when he/she outgrows the institution.

A word must be added, in this regard, about the emplacement of the institutions. When, outside any serious protocol, just for the sake of doing something with the children in two *dayah* and one *panti*, I asked them to draw the place they most loved and cherished, the great majority drew the institution. Some drew the name of God. The conversations that followed attested the importance, for them, to know that there was a place for them. *Their* cupboard. *Their* dormitory. *Their musyollah* ("dedicated space for devotion").

This brings us back to the collective importance of orphans for the Aceh-nese: the society makes place for poor children and this positively reverber-ates on the children's feeling of having a safe place to reside. The orphans and children I have talked with are not "outside" their society, nor are they at the margins, even though they grow separated from their former net-works of villages and towns. They rather constitute a powerful transforming symbolic suffering heart of the Acehnese society in the same way as a group of heroes might do[25]. Even in 2017, when memories of the catastrophes only began being exposed and problematised (Azhari and Idrya, 2017), building an orphanage was one of the first decisions that Irwandi Yusuf took after being elected as Governor, with campaign-raised money. He wanted to thank Allah for his election.

However, in order to be an integral, highly symbolic, protected, and cher-ished part of the "inside" of Acehnese society, the orphans must perform an idealised transformation from uncultivated villagers into model Muslims, a process where old Acehnese customs intertwine with globalized Islam and all-Indonesia trends. The non-performing ones are of no (symbolic) use, which brings to my last theoretical conclusion. A society which produces, through a war and a catastrophe, a mass of suffering children, cannot expect a deep transformation to happen through the erasing of most suffering. Drug abuse, unemployment and unplanned pregnancies are the other side of the rescued orphan and are as significative, or more, in pointing to a future society.

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[25] The importance of the heroic gesture for the making of Indonesia is well known. The Acehense child heroes echo both the young resistant army fashioning the Indonesian Independence and the submitted New Order children sacrificing themselves for their father's sake depicted by Shiraishi (1997).

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