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KABABAYEN-AN HAN KARAK-AN
(WOMEN OF STORM SURGES):
A FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH ON WOMEN SURVIVORS
OF SUPER TYPHOON YOLANDA

by

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Abstract

Two years after super typhoon Yolanda (internationally named Haiyan) ravaged the Visayan region of the Philippines, survivors of Leyte Island who were at the front line of the strongest storm in recorded history persist through waves of disaster. Anthropologists of disaster argue there is a need to trouble the assumed uniformity of disaster experiences in the same manner that feminist scholars argue for an intersectional analysis of vulnerabilities as shaped by racism, sexism, and ongoing projects of colonialism. This ethnographic research inquires: How do Waray women survivors make meaning of super typhoon Yolanda as expressed in their survival testimonies and disaster symbolisms? How do they view their everyday life in relation to the rain, rivers, and the sea? How do they mobilize memories of Yolanda to engage in practises of social repair? This on-site feminist ethnographic research was conducted in the town of Palo in the summer of 2015, with 12 self-identified Waray women interviewed from the three *barangays* or villages of San Miguel, Salvacion and Cogon. I argue that women survivors employ disaster memory as a cultural practise to repair their worldview, insisting on an ontology that still holds some meaning despite the wrathful destruction of a super typhoon that pounds repeatedly through the everyday violence of poverty. This thesis outlines how the women (a) personify the storm; (b) explain order and safety in cycles and seasons; and (c) explain syncretic theologies pertaining to ideas of justice. Writing as a transnational Filipina scholar-activist, I frame my work to serve a feminist and decolonizing purpose by weaving the women's survival testimonies together as acts of resistance over the chronic crises of everyday poverty, Yolanda and larger colonial histories. This thesis offers a Waray theory of survivance defined by an ancient ferocity in the Eastern Visayas, which claims a full humanity persisting through disaster deathscapes and the colonial present.

Preface

This ethnographic research was approved by the UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board with certificate number: H15-01412. The graduate research proposal was co-designed by the principal investigator, Dr. Leonora Angeles of the UBC School of Community and Regional Planning, and the co-investigator, Chaya Ocampo Go, who is a graduate student in the UBC Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice. The latter conducted the interviews on-site from June to August 2015, and completed the subsequent data analysis. Transcripts in the Tagalog and Waray languages were translated with the assistance of Jan Barrera.

Chapter 3 “*Pakikipag-Pulso* (Pulse-Taking) As Ethnography” was approved for presenting at the 10th International Conference on Philippine Studies (ICOPHIL10) in Siliman University, Dumaguete City, Philippines on July 6-8, 2016.

A version of the concluding chapter, entitled “Our Survival is Non-Negotiable: Necropolitics and Surviving Super Typhoon Haiyan”, was approved for presenting at the Graduate Student Conference for Southeast Asian Research at the UBC Centre for Southeast Asian Research on April 14-15, 2016.

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List of Acronyms

CRS – Catholic Relief Services

DILG – Department of Interior and Local Governance

DRRM – Disaster Risk Reduction and Management

DSWD – Department of Social Welfare and Development

LGU – Local Government Unit

UNFPA – United Nations Population Fund

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I am grateful to my relatives in the island of Leyte who hosted me in their homes for three months of El Niño heat and the *piyesta* season, for sharing their grief, fears and dreams with me, and for guiding my way through their rivers. Without your trust, there is no work to be done. *Damo nga salamat!*

Thank you to Dr. Rolando Borrinaga for meeting me in his hometown, and for sharing his historical and local knowledge so generously. Your research on Indigenous Visayas is an endless stream of inspiration to young scholars. A special thank you too to Fr. Albert Alejo SJ for reminding me that an anthropologist of disaster must look with as much clarity into a people's joy. "Do your work excellently, and it will be relevant", you told me. I will never forget your counsel.

To my beloved people, *ang bayang mahal*, thank you for always receiving my comings and goings. With the waters we flow on, we live on. *Padayon!*

Dedication

To my great grandmother, Lola Teresa,
my only bloodline to an ancient ferocity.

I. Introduction

1.1. Overview

Two years after super typhoon Yolanda (internationally named Haiyan) ravaged the Visayan region of the Philippines, survivors of Leyte Island who were at the front line of the strongest storm in recorded history persist through waves of disaster. On the 8th of November 2013, Yolanda left an estimated total of 10,000¹ missing and dead, and over four million displaced from devastated communities and ravaged ecologies. Yolanda's catastrophe, however, cannot be frozen within several hours of a Friday morning nor confined within national meteorological borders that determine what is called the 'Philippine Area of Responsibility'. Neither could recovery from its devastation be constricted into the phases of 'post'-disaster progressing linearly towards full rehabilitation. As this thesis would argue from the intergenerational stories of Waray women survivors, Yolanda and the many other disastrous forces inflicted upon the Eastern Visayas and its peoples are centuries old and signal different understandings of survival.

I was serving as a Project Officer for the Assisi Development Foundation, a local non profit advocating with Indigenous communities across the Philippines, when the super typhoon brought all our programs to a halt. Within the first week of the aftermath, the Board of Directors decided to realign all staff and financial resources to the Visayan islands. Countless of local non-government organizations, private foundations, church groups and ad hoc volunteer teams across the country responded with similar urgency to what "was and continues to be the biggest humanitarian crisis in the Philippines' history" (Packard, 2015). I was tasked to coordinate the

¹ The controversial figure of "10,000 dead" reported by Philippine National Police Chief Superintendent, Elmer Soria, was denied by the Malacañang Palace in the immediate aftermath. To date the official number of casualties is still disputed. The Government of the Philippines reports 7,254 missing and dead (Government of the Philippines, 2015), while a grassroots alliance of Yolanda survivors in the Eastern Visayas, People Surge, reports 18,000 (People Surge, 2015).

Secretariat for Task Force Tabang Visayas. I joined the coalition of civil society organizations for seven full months to conduct emergency relief and early recovery aid before commencing graduate studies in Canada. With my training in cultural anthropology and participatory development processes, I was moved to undertake a graduate research project that would allow me to pay more mindful attention to survivors' everyday lives—a different kind of labour that needed the slower time we did not afford in the quick-paced adrenaline-fuelled of providing relief aid.

Returning to island of Leyte as a graduate student, I conducted an ethnographic research to learn about Waray women survivors' everyday lives in relation to the rain, rivers and the sea. Through participant observation and conducting semi-structured interviews with 12 women from the three *barangays* or villages of San Miguel, Salvacion and Cogon, I listened to learn about a central inquiry: **How do women survivors make meaning of super typhoon Yolanda as expressed in their survival testimonies and disaster symbolisms?** I employ social memory as way to frame my analyses of their survival narratives, arguing that it is in the everyday telling of these stories that women survivors are able to mobilize memories of Yolanda to engage in practices of social repair. I write from the standpoint of a transnational Filipina scholar, with a feminist commitment to decolonize ethnographic research. A postcolonial lens is central to this project and its argument that the women's individual and collective experiences of the disaster are inextricably connected to colonial violence on the land and their bodies. Through my work I offer a Waray theory of disaster recovery and survivance² which is ultimately conveyed by the women's performative demonstration of a spirit of fearlessness and a refusal to die away. Despite ongoing dispossession, poverty, and the climate crisis, the women of storm surges will not be swept away.

² Anishinaabe cultural theorist, Gerald Vizenor, defines survivance as an active sense of presence by contemporary Native Americans, in contrast to the notion of passive victimhood. I employ the term here to write about survival alongside endurance and resistance in the context of post Yolanda.

1.2. Thesis Organization

Chapter One: “Introduction” of this thesis reinstates the thesis topic, the central research inquiry, my positionality, key arguments, and presents an overview of the epistemological and methodological approaches used in the research. It includes an outline of the thesis organization.

Chapter Two: “Contextualizing Disasters” uncovers the colonial histories which have wrecked havoc in the Eastern Visayan region centuries prior to Yolanda, illustrating a Waray worldview characterized by a people of a particular ferocity and shaped by an ecology of survivance. Just as chronic poverty, gender based violence and other development challenges pre-existed Yolanda and are now compounded by the super typhoon, I argue that Yolanda must form part of a longer continuum of colonial histories. Both the slow death of poverty and the apocalyptic rupture of Yolanda could weave together an analysis of women’s survival in Leyte, long before the storm and long after it.

Chapter Three: “Resisting Disaster Deathscapes” reviews related and interdisciplinary literature to argue for how women’s vulnerabilities are formed by intersections of racism, sexism, historical and contemporary projects of capitalism, colonialism, militarization and nationalism. The selected literature focuses on multiple cases of disasters including those from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami impacting South and Southeast Asia, the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and Hurricane Katrina which drowned the Gulf Region in 2005. I in turn employ this review of related literature to argue for a similar intersectional analysis of super typhoon Yolanda’s impact on women survivors in the Philippine context. As this larger thesis intends to contribute, there is a need to trouble the assumed uniformity of disaster experiences across island-nations³ as

³ I coin the term ‘island-nations’ to illustrate the highly regionalistic social and political identities in the Philippine archipelago, hinting at notions of pre/postcolonial sovereignty at play in each geographical area.

communities are affected by, experience and understand extreme weather conditions in unique ways, as they do resist and participate in agentic acts of survivance.

Chapter Four: “*Pakikipag-Pulso (Pulse-Taking) as Ethnography*” details the conduct of this on-site feminist ethnographic research in the town of Palo in the summer of 2015. I first trace my intellectual genealogies by positioning my work as informed by movements of feminist and decolonizing scholarship which have emerged all across the postcolonial world. I then draw on the methods offered by *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* or Indigenous Philippine Psychology to theorize on *pakikipag-pulso* (pulse-taking together) as ethnography: research as relationships, relatedness and responsibility in the context of disaster. I write in the same thick description I journalled with in my field notes, and with a mindfulness needed in participant observation. I similarly employ reflexivity to articulate and problematize my positionality, as advocated for by feminist scholarship. This chapter concludes by exploring the potentials for writing ethnographies in Philippine disaster contexts with the pursuit of solidarity for social and climate justice.

Chapter Five: “*Kababayen-an Han Karak-an (Women of Storm Surges)*” forms the main body of this work. It provides an in-depth analysis of the stories shared by women survivors. How do Waray women survivors make meaning of super typhoon Yolanda in their survival testimonies and disaster symbolisms? How do they mobilize memories of Yolanda to engage in practices of social repair? I argue that the women survivors employ disaster memory as a cultural practise to repair their worldview, insisting on an ontology that still holds some meaning despite the wrathful destruction of a super typhoon that pounds repeatedly through the everyday violence of poverty. This section outlines how the women (a) personify the storm; (b) explain order and safety in cycles and seasons; and (c) explain syncretic theologies pertaining to ideas of justice. By naming their living world and experiences, I argue that Waray women survivors reclaim an

indigenous worldview and epistemology wherein they are able to enact their ancient ferocity to survive everyday and extraordinary circumstances.

The **Conclusion** closes the thesis by offering a Waray theory of recovery and survivance based on the women's survival testimonies and a Waray Origin Story. The chapter ends by offering recommendations for promoting women's organizing and leadership in disaster preparedness, community development and social justice efforts in the island-nations of the Eastern Visayas.

This research project is ultimately informed by the responsibility I recognize when I join my *kapwa*, my self in others, in solidarity as they persist through centuries-old storms.

II. Contextualizing Disasters: The Waray Worldview & Colonial Histories

Chapter 2 uncovers the colonial histories which have wrecked havoc in the Eastern Visayan region centuries prior to Yolanda, illustrating a Waray worldview characterized by a people of a particular ferocity and shaped by an ecology of survivance. Just as chronic poverty, gender based violence and other development challenges pre-existed Yolanda and are now compounded by the super typhoon, I argue that Yolanda must form part of a longer continuum of colonial histories. Both the slow death of poverty and the apocalyptic rupture of Yolanda could weave together an analysis of women's survival in Leyte, long before the storm and long after it.

On the 12th of June 2015, the day of Philippine Independence, my mother and I hailed a cab in Manila for the domestic airport. We were going to take our first flight together to Leyte Island where we conducted separate emergency relief responses during the immediate aftermath of Yolanda. This time we were travelling together for our first homecoming to Palo, the hometown of my great grandmother, Lola Teresa. In an animated conversation with the cab driver, he learned that his two Tagalog-speaking passengers have Waray heritage. As a Waray labour migrant to the capital from Leyte, he eagerly proceeded to educate us on our shared identity: *“Ma’am, nasa dugo ang pagiging Waray. Dahil may halo na kayong Tagalog, natubigan na. Pero lalabas din yan, ma’am! Tignan ninyo, lalabas ang tapang ninyo!”* [Ma’am, to be Waray is in the blood. Because you’ve been mixed with Tagalog, your Waray blood has already been watered down. But it will come out! You’ll see, your ferocity will come out!]

This is how Manila has come to know the Waray—*walang inaatrasan* [no retreat], one who does not ever back down from anything, whose temper and ferocity are often made known to others despite the discomfort it may arouse. Historian and Yolanda survivor, Dr. Rolando Borrinaga, writes that the proper ethno-linguistic term for his people is ‘Waraywaray’. Sometimes it is spelled with a hyphen but today people colloquially self-identify as ‘Waray’—a people characterized by an attitude of ‘brinkmanship’, of pursuing something to its farthest limits (2015).

The repetition of the word ‘*waray*’, which literally means ‘nothing’, seems to double emphasize the people’s extreme ability to persist until absolutely nothing remains. The popular film *Waray-Waray* of 1954 for instance, starring famed Filipino actors Nida Blanca and Nestor de Villa, gave rise to the iconic song lyric: “*Talagang ganyan ang Waray-Waray—sa pagsinta at labanan... patay kung patay!*” [That is truly how the Waray-Waray is—in love or in war... they die if they have to!] This reifies the now popular stereotype of the Binisaya-speaking migrant worker in Manila from the Eastern Visayan provinces of Leyte and Samar who is portrayed to be rather temperamental and quarrelsome.

Borrinaga traces this ancient ferocity to colonial archives by Spanish conquistadors who called the Waray ‘*pintados*’ for their tattooed skins and notoriety in warfare (2015). These distinguished tattoos differed in each region and were elaborate symbols of great valor, earned after victories, “whether it was a youth’s first taste of war or sex, either in battle or love” (Scott, 1994, p. 20)—bearing an uncanny similarity to lines sung from the modern pop song. The Waray, like the rest of the colonized archipelago and Nuevo Mundo in Latin America, were also called ‘*indios*’—a racialized term created by the Spaniards to call all Indigenous peoples of their colonies. A historical study on clothing in 19th century Philippines elaborates on the categories of race, gender and class which emerged in colonial society (Coo, 2015). Colonial archives such as the Boxer Codex of 1590 record the tattooed or painted bodies of the Visayans covered entirely with beautiful figures marked by ink and blood. The Europeans were in awe of and feared this ‘savagery’, but also laboured to praise the natives’ use of any fabric for ‘modesty’⁴. Although tattoos were required for public esteem by either men or women, with substantive evidence for

⁴ Historian of pre-Hispanic Philippines, William Henry Scott, challenged early Spanish chronicles which obsessed to describe Visayan men and women’s clothes because “it is hard to believe any pre-Hispanic dress code would have dictated the hiding of those prestigious decorations [tattoos] so painfully acquired [by warfare]” (Scott, 1994 p.21).

Visayan women bearing tattoos in their hands and arms (Scott, 1994, pp. 20-21), scant if not none of the historical archives name Waray women as *'pintadas'*. Such sexist logics undermined gender identity in pre-colonial Philippines, and was launched alongside racist colonial logics which ascribed the nomadic Aetas to be of greatest inferiority by virtue of their darker skin colour (Coo, 2015, pp. 97-98). Similar to the obsession over garments and skin pigmentation as some marker of human value, racial hierarchies were first constructed by the Spaniards who called the near-naked hunter-gatherers *'negritos'* and placed the *'little black ones'* at the bottom of civilization. The conquistadors proceeded to place the Austronesian *indio* one rank higher up this racial caste system, which ascends to *Mestizos de Sangley* or those of mixed Chinese heritage and the *Mestizos de Español* or those mixed with Spanish heritage, ultimately with the *Insulares* or Spaniards born in *Las Islas Filipinas* at the top. This position of white supremacy was later replaced by the Americans as the United States' colonial census of 1903-1905 reinforced the preceding racialized imperial order.

Lola Nilda, my grandmother's cousin, handed me a three-page document typewritten by hand from the 1960s. She explains with great care that this historical narrative of Palo was written in English by C.D. Montejo, her uncle Cerefino, who they called more fondly as Lolo Pino. The only original copy in lined yellow pages, with a corner burnt from a fire, had survived the yearly floods in Barangay San Miguel. I read Lolo Pino's historical account of their hometown which explains the name *'Palo'* as a derivative from the Spanish word for *'wood'*, referencing perhaps the mast of conquistadors' ships that first docked on their shores. With the first arrival of Augustinian friars and Jesuit priests in the late 16th century, Palo grew from a *sitio* in 1521 to a *barrio* or village in 1768, and later a town with its own *gobernadorcillo* or a port captain appointed by the Governor General under the Spanish Crown. The first Franciscan friars arrived in 1843 and

noted a total population of 6,588, which in Lolo Pino’s writing had already grown to 30,000. This figure has since doubled over to 67,966 in a 2013 census (Local Government Unit of Palo, 2015)⁵. In 1849 the town’s native founders—*ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Panganuron, *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Manlangit, *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Kadampug, *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Kawaring, *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Kumagu, *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Kumagang, *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Maglain, *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Kabalhin, *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Bilyu, and *ᜆᜄᜃᜄᜃᜄᜃ* Dilyu⁶—were ordered to adopt Spanish surnames to be administered directly under the imperial rule from Manila.

At the height of the Philippine revolution in the late 19th century, a destructive typhoon ravaged Palo in 1897 and completely unroofed the cathedral. Women survivors today similarly told me of a ‘*delubyo*’, a great storm that happened 100 years ago according to their oral traditions. They said it was especially mighty with coconut fruits flying like bowling balls across the skies, wrecking people’s homes and the *poblacion* or the town plaza where the powers of State and Church have stayed seated for centuries. Sitting on wooden benches outside a *sari-sari* or convenience store, two grandmothers and three young mothers cradling their toddlers began to theorize the place name of Tacloban City, Yolanda’s ‘ground zero’. “*Amo it gingaranan an Tacloban hin Tacloban kay na-takloban an Tacloban! Na natabunan daw!*” [And this is why we call the place Tacloban because Tacloban had been covered! They say it was completely buried!] “*Nataklob! Natabunan! Nawaray!*” [Covered! Buried! Disappeared!] The women traced this deluge to a century ago, explaining that Yolanda had been duly prophesized, as much as the next one that is to arrive a century later from today. The women’s collective memory indeed matches

⁵ In a presentation on February 17th 2015, the Local Government Unit of Palo reports that Yolanda left them with 1,041 dead and 212 missing. Its injured population of 6,800 equates to the total population of Palo in the 1800s.

⁶ The baybayin script is the precolonial writing system found in variations across different islands, in use at least a century prior to Spanish invasion. Its absence in today’s literacies is a legacy of colonial erasures. The standard I write with here is based on the Doctrina Christiana convention.

historical records of a strong typhoon in the year 1897, dating 116 years prior to Yolanda, which was reported in Spanish as “El Baguio de Samar y Leyte” (The Typhoon of Samar and Leyte) by a Jesuit priest (Borrinaga R. , 2015, p. 240).

Lolo Pino writes that the Filipino revolutionary government moved its provincial capital from Tacloban to Palo in 1899, with its headquarters in the Palo Convent. Its spacious grounds today serve as one of the town’s largest designated evacuation centres for communities right along the typhoon belt. American expeditionary forces arrived in 1901 after Commander Dewey’s victory over the Spanish fleet in Manila Bay, marking a second colonial occupation led by G.I.’s teaching ABCs and Thomasite missionary teachers running the country’s first public schools. Today General MacArthur’s double life-size bronze statue still stands in the Landing Memorial National Park along the Leyte coast to commemorate his heroic comeback on October 20, 1944, after his historic proclamation of “I shall return!” in 1942, promising the Philippines an Allied victory against the Japanese in World War II. Though arguably a monument to U.S. imperialism, Lolo Pino, Lola Nilda and other elders in Palo today take pride in having lived to see this great liberating moment. “You should go take a souvenir photo with him!”, they would remind me.

Who is the Waray?

Archie Zabala, a well-loved painter and sculptor of the Kasi-kasi Art Collective in Palo, shares with me his inquiries as we sat in conversation one cool night. Who is the Waray? Lamenting the scant historical archive of who his ancestors were, who the heroes of Balangiga⁷ were and how they looked like, he instead decided to look deep into a mirror one day. He carved

⁷ The famed battle at Balangiga in 1901 is remembered for the attack waged by local guerrillas in Samar Island of the Eastern Visayas during the Philippine-American War. The revolutionaries were dressed in disguise as women in a funeral parading a coffin filled with armaments, and killed 48 members of the U.S. 9th Infantry. The American soldiers retaliated and massacred the town. The stolen Balangiga church bells remain on American soil as war booty.

his face into a soft piece of *santol* wood, the self-portrait of a raging man, a bald head veiled in disguise as a woman—but perhaps also revealing the familiar ferocity the Waray women are equally known for. He demonstrates his pose for me: big muscular fists gripping a rifle tight, forearms lunging forward, ready to fight. “*Kaya siguro walang bumili. Nakakatakot.*” “Maybe that is why no one bought it. It is fearsome”, recalls Kuya Archie timidly with a shrug. His wooden sculpture was washed away by Yolanda, along with 12 in his family.

Not all who live in Palo self-identify as Waray, given the constant migration fluxes across islands and provinces in the Philippines. It is common for many households in Palo to have relatives living and working in Cebu City, the largest urban center in Central Visayas. It is only a ferry ride away from Leyte Island where Cebuano, another variant language of Bisaya, is predominantly spoken. Even more admired and desired were relatives or neighbors who migrated to Manila, the country’s Tagalog-speaking capital, to seek employment. If one dares, Manila also presents opportunities to migrate farther as an Overseas Filipino Worker and earn in dollars. While such migratory and linguistic fluidities exist, the Waray language, however, remains widely used in Northern Leyte and Samar. Waray is differentiated from Bisaya which is more commonly spoken by other locals in Central and Southern Leyte, and therefore retains a strong ethno-linguistic identity. The annual Pintados Festival in Leyte are popular performances of the Waray identity as locals parade in full elaborate costumes. Interestingly, only men today dance with patterns painted on their nude-coloured suits to artificially replicate the ancestral tattoos. Representations of what it means to be Waray and a woman are absent in festive motifs of ferocity and warfare.

The sound of church bells ring, a sound now nearly 500 years old, still calling the town to mass. The cathedral standing tall with its new bright red roofs is still where all of Palo gathers

today, and where piles of over 700 bodies were brought for blessing and burial. Headless coconut trees stick out of the ground like brown matchsticks, while green banana trees and other foliage bloom. Smoke rising in thin piles across the vista: people are cooking rice in blackened pots, chopped wood burning, a pig is squealing maybe about to be slaughtered. Large tarpaulins with Pope Francis' smiling face, one hand up waving and blessing, have not been taken down since the papal visit in January 17, 2015. "*Damo nga salamat, Padre Francisco!*" The ravaged town still gives thanks to the God-incarnate who came to see them for a day. The neighbor is singing her favourite pop rock love songs on karaoke again. The sound of hammers pounding nails into coco lumber, square iron sheets on repaired roofs seamed together like metallic patchwork. Walking on the bridge over Bangon River, I spotted something like a large rice sack floating on the murky brown waters. I stopped to take a closer look, the bridge trembling beneath my feet as trucks and jeepneys zoomed by. Was that bloated flesh? I looked around, but I was the only pedestrian on the bridge. Terrified, I gripped the rail to peer closer. I spotted a tail, then four limbs. A dead pig that probably slipped down the riverbanks and drowned, its carcass now floating with plastic garbage. It has been over a year and the streets are now clean of debris with the annual town fiesta about to start. Suddenly, I was revisited by the mass burials we witnessed working as emergency relief workers. There I understood the hauntings are real.

"MATAPANG yung Waray, ma'am! Kaya yung Tagalog takot sa Waray eh! PAG AKO YUNG INAWAY, TALAGANG LALABAN AKO! HINDI AKO UURONG! ...Pero ma'am joke-joke lang din ah, hindi naman lahat matapang." [Ma'am, the Waray is FEARLESS! That is why the Tagalog is scared of the Waray! IF SOMEONE QUARELLED WITH ME, I WOULD REALLY FIGHT! I WILL NOT BACK DOWN! ...But I'm joking, ma'am. You know not all of us are brave.] Nanay Lydia along with two other *barangay* health workers permit me to join them in the

barangay health centre where several mothers walked in that afternoon for prenatal check-ups. With great enthusiasm she stood up standing and dramatized a comic tragedy of sorts to her bewildered and entertained audience of how she survived Yolanda. Referencing to me as the meek Manilaña that they perceived me to be, she contrasted herself as the fierce Waray woman who could scream and rile up her village, her *kababayen-an* or co-women to run to safety. Nanay Lydia, however, makes a crucial point that the Waray ferocity is performed: one could summon it when needed, but it is also not a fact.

In a similar vein I problematize the rhetoric of resilience purported by international humanitarianism, seen for example in the music video which had been shockingly entitled: “Happy: Philippines After Typhoon Haiyan”⁸ (United Nations Development Programme, 2014). This was used by the United Nations Foundation “to put a spotlight on the power and importance of UN humanitarian efforts around the world” (Jennings & Taylor, 2014) wherein Yolanda survivors in Tacloban City were filmed dancing to the pop song “Happy” amidst catastrophic debris, stranded ships, and mounds of rubble from the wake of a super typhoon. This “Filipino brand of resilience” (Quismundo, 2014) is similarly perpetuated by the Philippine government which said that it was the media’s role to uplift the spirits of the Filipino people, “to find stories of resilience instead of focusing on slow search and rescue, relief, and recovery efforts” (IBON Foundation, Inc., 2015, p. 55). With its “Build Back Better” motto for post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation efforts, the Philippine government was quick to promote a national optimism, rousing an unwavering ‘Filipino spirit’ that would not be defeated, despite the government’s own

⁸ The video was produced by a Belgian volunteer, Quentin Musset, who reveals his motivation for the project: “We wanted to help, we wanted to do something good in our lives and see for ourselves, not just the television” (Jennings & Taylor, 2014). I argue that this very lack of critical thought concerning the ethics of international humanitarianism is a contemporary form of colonialism, where ‘aid’, ‘help’, and ‘salvation’ are celebrated without problematizing privilege and power differentials between aid workers and local community members. To criticize Musset’s work is *not* to deny survivors’ real capacities for joy and resilience; however, his 3-minute clip filmed as a ‘souvenir’ after 10 days volunteering completely ignores the performance as being for the White male gaze behind his camera.

bureaucratic failure to provide a national master plan within a year after or even respond to calls to investigate cases of disaster capitalism. These metanarratives of resilience by State and international humanitarian agencies grossly erase issues of social and climate injustices. They are instead an abhorrent mockery of the real violence survivors live with in the everyday, and ultimately fail to recognize what Nanay Lydia teaches us: “not all Waray are brave”.

Poverty in the Region



The Eastern Visayas, numbered today as Region VIII out of the 17 regions which the national archipelago has been subcategorized into, is composed of the two main island provinces of Leyte and Samar. The Pacific Ocean lies directly to its east where an average of eight to nine tropical storms enter from during the annual monsoon season. The region by 2016 is still largely characterized as rural with a majority of its 4 million people working as farmers and fishers. Agriculture remains to be its largest sector with the region ranking as the third largest producer of coconut and the eighth largest producer of rice in the country. Leyte, Southern Leyte and Northern Samar also score as the top three provinces in the country whose agricultural land constitutes more than 50% of its total land area (Regional Development Council, 2011, p. 3). Apart from a dependence on the annual cycles of *amihan*, a dry season brought by the northeastern winds, and *habagat*, a rainy season brought by the southwestern winds, local communities rely on the bodies of water which surround and course through the islands. Five major bays shape its coasts and three large watersheds nourish the ecological diversity of the region. In the island of Leyte alone, there are at least five main river

bodies branching out to countless streams and tributaries ensuring regular irrigation and replenishing the flow of nutrients to floodplains and farm fields. The region remains primarily productive with rice and corn-fields and is known for its vast coconut plantations.

The poverty situation in the region has, however, ranked the most severe in the country. In regional statistical surveys conducted from the years 2003 to 2009, the poverty incidence in the region is shown to have steadily increased across the years. The National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) of Region VIII reports that the rise in the magnitude of its food-poor population equates to 794,766 people being unable to meet their basic food requirements in 2009 (Ibid. p.14). The 2011 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey similarly reports families in the Eastern Visayas to be suffering the highest incidence of hunger (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2011). Although the agriculture and fishery sector accounts for 33.5% of the Gross Regional Domestic Product (GRDP), the regional economy's largest contributor faces an ageing farming and fishing population alongside a decreasing growth rate across the years 2004 to 2009 (Ibid. p10). It can be noted that among the six provinces listed in the region [Table 1], Eastern Samar scores the highest poverty incidence of 58%, which is comparable to the whole of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) that has been notoriously mired in decades of armed conflict.

Region VIII Eastern Visayas	Population ('000)	Per Capita Income	Per Capita Expenditure	Poverty Incidence (%)
Leyte	1,789	49,251	38,535	31.9
Southern Leyte	399	45,362	36,440	36.4
Eastern Samar	429	30,147	25,240	59.4
Western Samar	733	27,393	22,895	36.0
Northern Samar	589	32,367	23,732	43.7
Biliran	162	42,872	40,578	20.7

Table 1: Conditions in Region VIII before Typhoon Yolanda (Ravago & Mapa, 2014, p. 2)

The Philippine population in 1960 was estimated at 26.3 million and tripled nationally at 102 million by 2015. With Leyte's population only doubling from 1960 to 2013, the low

population growth suggests a higher out-migration rate and possibly a higher mortality rate due to diseases and disasters in the region. According to census data in the last century, the Eastern Visayan region consistently ranks as the top third or higher in the country for its high ratio of population outflow especially to Manila (Hosoda, 2007, p. 8). Patterns of outmigration from the Eastern Visayas indicate that the capital is its most important destination, with women accounting for a larger percentage of the migrants from the region, especially in the age range of 15 to 29 years old (Ibid, p. 9-12). The data on outmigration from the Eastern Visayas suggests that not only is majority of the migrants in their working-age and seeking employment in the capital, but that also a limited number of people from Manila move to the region, or return from Manila to their original region (Ibid).

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority in a survey released in June 2012, the poverty incidence for women in Region VIII has also been on a constant increase from 2003 to 2012. In the year 2012, a year before super typhoon Yolanda, the poverty incidence for women in the region already ranked the second highest in the country, outranked only by the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) [Table 2] (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2014). A regional gender situationer published by the National Statistical Coordination Board in 2013 similarly exemplify the vulnerabilities experienced by women in Region VIII [Table 3] (National Statistics Coordination Board, 2013). Poor women often shoulder unpaid labour as farmers and fishers in addition to child rearing, household management, and community care work. Gender inequality remains a considerable factor for poverty in the Eastern Visayas, particularly in the issue of land reform with less than 16,000 women granted certificates of land ownership awards compared to more than 33,000 grants awarded to men (Ibid).

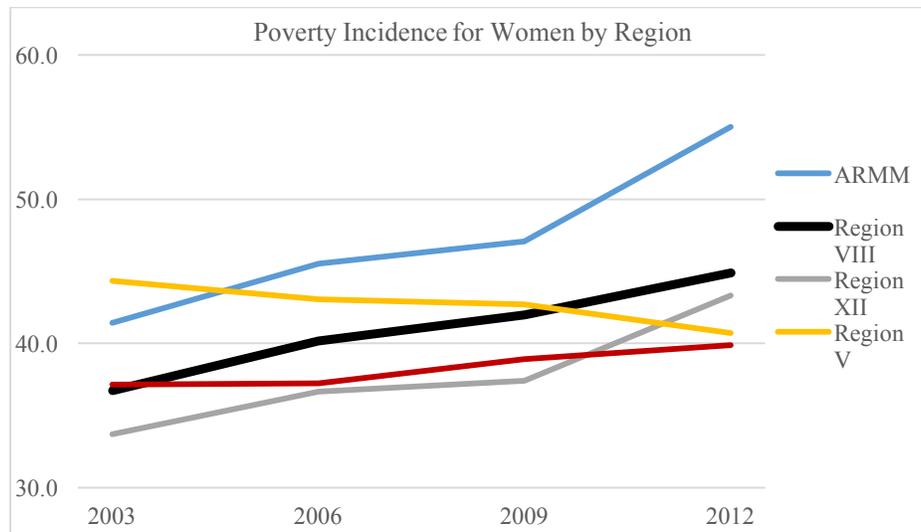


Table 2: Poverty Incidence for Women by Region: Bottom 5 Regions

Sources: Philippine Statistics Authority Poverty Incidence for Women by Region: 2003, 2006 and 2009; and Poverty Incidence for Women by Region: 2006, 2009 and 2012

Reproductive Health	Labour	Land	Gendered Violence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of women ages 15-24 years old who have begun childbearing increased from 25.0% in 2003 to 30.8% in 2008; Majority of currently married women aged 15-49 years old are not using any contraceptive methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The labour force participation rate for men (80.7%) was significantly higher than women (49.8%) in 2011; The unemployment rate of women (5.9%) was slightly higher than that of men (4.8%); Women account for a larger percentage of labour migrants leaving the region for Manila. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men comprised more than two-thirds or 68.7% of the 463 certificate of land ownership award (CLOA) holders in 2012, with men comprising 7 out of 10 agrarian reform beneficiaries in 2012. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women comprised 87.5% of the victims of trafficking, with more than half or 56.2% of the trafficked victims in the region in 2012 were young, aged 13-17 years old.

Table 3: Gender Situationer in the Eastern Visayas Region (National Statistics Coordination Board, 2013)

Anthropologist Henrik Vigh writes about the concept of ‘chronic crisis’ which argues for understanding crisis not as isolated events, singular turning points, or disparate moments of rupture, but rather to understand crisis *as* context. “For many people around the world—the chronically ill, the structurally violated, socially marginalized and poor—the world is not characterized by peace, prosperity and order but by the presence and possibility of conflict, poverty and disorder” (Vigh, H., 2008, p. 7). In this view, the chronic poverty characteristic of Region VIII is therefore not merely attributed to a ‘geographical accident’ of being located at the route of

typhoons. As Filipino political economist Walden Bello argues, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few landed elites and the enduring land reform crisis are a direct legacy of centuries of colonialism and serve to be the prime causes of locking the country in a chronic or 'permanent state of crisis' (2004). Particularly in the Eastern Visayas, the present oligopoly in the coconut and copra industry compound to perpetuate the dispossession of the local communities. Copra, the meat of harvested coconuts smoked black to extract oils, is the top export product in the region and the primary source of agricultural income for farmers. Despite being the top export industry in the region, the copra economy is a form of modern-day enslavement that locks land-poor tenants in a vicious cycle of poverty. Today the region has the largest land remaining on leasehold, the worst poverty incidence among agrarian reform beneficiaries, and the lowest number of paid or fully paid farmers (IBON Foundation, Inc., 2015, p. 77). In the context of such economic misery, the Eastern Visayas has served as the base for the New People's Army, the armed faction of the Communist Party of the Philippines. Decades of guerilla insurgency and state counter-insurgency operations have led to intense militarization in the region. As Vigh espouses anthropology as a discipline to demonstrate the consequences of large-scale processes on lived everyday life, this ethnographic research similarly intends to reveal Waray women survivors' perspectives of chronic crisis in their everyday lives.

Women in the aftermath of a super typhoon

On the 8th of November 2013, super typhoon Yolanda plunged the region into deadlier levels of desperation. Out of the 12.2 million people affected, 35% are from the Eastern Visayas where the first landfall occurred. At least 80% of the reported deaths come from the Leyte towns of Tacloban, Palo, and Tanauan where the storm surges crashed in (Ravago & Mapa, 2014).

Yolanda damaged 33 million coconut trees in the year 2013, an estimated loss of \$396 million by the Philippine Coconut Authority, placing a great risk to at least one million farming households (Oxfam, 2014).

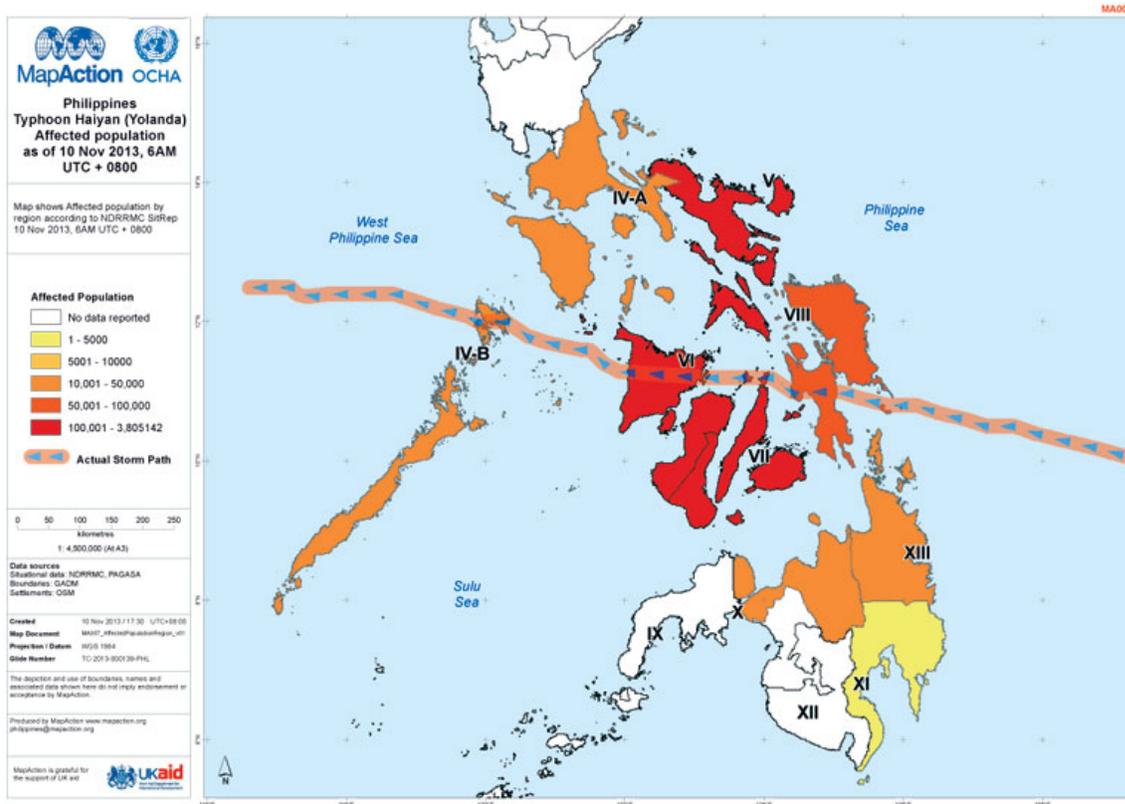


Figure 1: Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) Affected Population by Region, November 10, 2013
 Source: United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)

Just as disasters serve to intensify pre-existing challenges, gender inequalities and gendered vulnerabilities too persist and were magnified by Yolanda. In a report published by Oxfam Philippines one year after, “Women After The Storm” highlights key gender issues in the post-Yolanda recovery and rehabilitation processes. The publication outlines some of the following key points relating to women’s survival, including: the need to recognize gender-differentiated needs, gender-specific roles, capacities and potentials; to respond to gender-based violence; to include sexual and reproductive health in emergency responses; to support women’s livelihoods,

capacities, and roles in the cash and care economies (Oxfam Philippines, 2014, pp. 4-5). Similarly, as outlined in “Disaster Upon Disaster: Lessons Beyond Yolanda”, the IBON Foundation sheds light on the gendered vulnerabilities experienced by Yolanda women survivors. Apart from the seemingly more obvious problems suffered by all disaster victims concerning the lack of water, food, medicine, power, hygiene, sanitation, and so forth, often neglected crisis areas relating to women include the need for protection from sexual harassment and molestation especially in overcrowded evacuation centres, and the provision of reproductive health services (IBON Foundation, Inc., 2015, p. 10). Valerio, who served as a gender-based violence coordinator in Tacloban City for the Family Planning Organization of the Philippines, outlines the effects of the storm on women and girls’ sexual and reproductive health rights and increased vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence, highlighting the persistent lack of a gendered lens in disaster literature and praxis (Valerio, 2014). Findings from the Women’s International Solidarity Mission led by GABRIELA⁹ Philippines report an increase in prostitution and human trafficking after the super typhoon (Ibid, p. 11). The Department of Social Welfare and Development in Region VIII have also confirmed the recorded rise in cases of violence against women and children immediately after Yolanda, with GABRIELA assisting in the monitoring of reports on alleged prostitution dens in Yolanda-affected areas (Ibid).

Women after the storm returned to familiar livelihoods and care work, only now with lesser income and more precarious opportunities. To cope with greater desperate conditions, women engaged in a variety of income generating activities and compensated the smaller returns with more efforts to engage in “the less dignified and less paid types of work such as doing other

⁹ GABRIELA is a nationwide network of grassroots organizations advocating for women’s issues in the Philippines, and a political party in the Philippine Congress. Its regional chapter in the Eastern Visayas is in Samar Island, with a satellite office in Palo to serve Leyte Island. GABRIELA joins other leftist Filipino organizations to form “People Surge” after Yolanda, an alliance of disaster survivors in the Philippines.

household’s laundry, taking care of other women’s children, or being a house helper” (Oxfam Philippines, 2014, p. 20). Women are reported to be more likely to be in debt, and also more prone to being victims of gender-based violence due to men’s negative coping strategies to stressful survival concerns. The number of violence against women cases reported in Tacloban and Palo in Leyte in the first quarter of 2014 is already almost half of the total cases in 2013 (Ibid, p. 23). Gender defines one’s survival after the storm.

Problematizing Poverty (and its normalization)

“*Hiagi*” (Fortune)

By Voltaire Q. Oyzon (2008)

*inin kawarayan
kay iya ka
rarayandayanan
ngan pagbabadoan hin*

This poverty
will
adorn
and clothe you

kaalo

in shame

*basi tamdon,
basi hangdon
an nahingalimtan
nga tinikangan.*

that you may look down upon,
or look up to
the beginning you’ve
forgotten.

The conquistadors laboured to chronicle the ‘*pintados*’, male bodies covered in inked and bloodied patterns, masculinizing the bodies of barbaric pagan warriors with the use of the male noun in plural form. As could be found in Ignacio Francisco Alcina’s book *Historia de las Islas e Indios de Bisayas* of 1668, Ferdinand Magellan baptized the Philippine islands as ‘*Las Islas de los Pintados*’ [The Islands of the Painted Ones] because of the abundance of tattooing the Spaniards encountered (Wilcken, 2013). Yet, the dominance of maleness linguistically erases all Waray women in the record—who are not written about as ‘*pintadas*’ for instance—and whose bodies

were decorated with a similar honourable ferocity. The women of today's poorest region too in the Philippines?

Poverty, or the “discovery of poverty” (Escobar, 1999; 1995), may rightfully be challenged as a Western paradigm which measures development in the capitalist economic standards of industrialization and modernization. Debates ensue to critique the logic of modernization as a perpetuation of colonial logics upholding cultural imperialism and the Westernization of the world today through the political and economic processes of neoliberalism and globalization. Quoting the words of South Asian ecofeminist and activist, Vandana Shiva: “Culturally perceived poverty need not be real material poverty: subsistence economies which serve basic needs through self-provisioning are not poor in the sense of being deprived. Yet the ideology of development declares them so because they don't participate overwhelmingly in the market economy, and do not consume commodities provided for and distributed through the market” (cited in Pieterse, 2010, p. 111). Post-development theorists problematize the very representations of the ‘developed’ versus ‘developing’ worlds, akin to the categories of ‘First World’ and ‘Third World’ which still reference to persisting colonial logics. They argue that there is a need to differentiate across ‘frugality’, ‘destitution’ and ‘scarcity’ in the context of subsistence economies, wherein ‘poverty’ is not simply a deficit or marked as being below a certain commodity-based threshold set by capitalist standards (Ibid, pp. 112-115). The feminization of poverty—the linking of poverty to women rather than gender relations, the creation of women as victims rather than agents, and the measurement of poverty by the privation of income rather than grassroots experiences, for instance—similarly needs to be problematized in the development framework (Chant, 2007).

Waray poet, Voltaire Oyzon, writes about the Waray's postcolonial trauma inflicted by both foreign colonization and imperial Manila. His poem *Hiagi* (Fortune) above illustrates poverty

not only as a form of socio-economic scarcity and dispossession, but also as the shaming, dehumanization, and erasure caused by hegemonic powers over those relegated to the margins (Agustin, 2014). Waray women: the *pintadas* absent in colonial archives, the women silent in Waray literature and even satirized by male Visayan *ilustrados* or nationalist intellectuals (Bagulaya, 2004), and who at present constitute as the poorest women in the country living on the islands at the geographical peripheries of an archipelagic nation-state. Victims or survivors, or more?

The meteorological term ‘storm surge’ which refers to violent coastal floods caused by tropical cyclones translates in the Waray language as  *karak-an* (Borrinaga, 2014). It sounds strikingly similar to the word *karat-an*¹⁰ or great harm which could befall humanity. As the Waray women survivors’ narratives demonstrate in this thesis, those impacted by Yolanda challenge the fixed binary categories of ‘victims’ who helplessly endure suffering and of ‘survivors’ who actively struggle to overcome. They demonstrate how these identities could in turn be appropriated in an agentic manner—as women impacted by the violence of storm surges but who are also made of the very same ferocity—when they articulate, embody and perform what it means to recover and survive.

¹⁰ In the Lord’s Prayer or “Our Father” [*Amay Namon*] which is recited in every Catholic mass, the following lines speak of *karat-an* or great harm in Waray: “*Ayaw kami ikadto hin makuri nga pagrubya, kundi panalipdi kami tikang kan Karat-an*” [Do not leave us into temptation but deliver us from evil]. This Catholic prayer of supplication duly recognizes the misery endured by the devotee in everyday life, but masks everyday agentic acts which transform the violence evoked by the wrathful words *karak-an* and *karat-an*.

III. Resisting Disaster Deathscapes: A Review of Related Literature on Racialized Women & Disasters

Chapter 3 reviews related and interdisciplinary literature to argue for how women's vulnerabilities are formed by intersections of racism, sexism, historical and contemporary projects of capitalism, colonialism, militarization and nationalism. The selected literature focuses on multiple cases of disasters including those from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami impacting South and Southeast Asia, the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in Japan, and Hurricane Katrina which drowned the Gulf Region in 2005. I in turn employ this review of related literature to argue for a similar intersectional analysis of super typhoon Yolanda's impact on women survivors in the Philippine context. As this larger thesis intends to contribute, there is a need to trouble the assumed uniformity of disaster experiences across island-nations as communities are affected by, experience and understand extreme weather conditions in unique ways, as they do resist and participate in agentic acts of survivance.

Disasters as Deathscapes

Disasters are often framed as 'natural' catastrophes, as 'inevitable' meteorological forces, or tragedies that bear 'no one's fault' but are the victims' own tragic 'misfortunes'. Such discourses conceal the structural injustices which determine people's vulnerabilities to disasters. In his work *Necropolitics*, Mbembe writes about death-worlds and topographies of the living dead formed by the power wielded to let live and let die (2003). Mbembe questions Foucault's concept of biopower—defined as the State's imposition of political power on all aspects of human life—in this age of terror: "Is the notion of biopower sufficient to account for the contemporary ways in which the political, under the guise of war, of resistance, or of the the fight against terror, makes the murder of the enemy its primary and absolute objective?" (Ibid, p. 12). Mbembe draws on Fanon's work among other revolutionary philosophers to examine a variety of racialized spaces: Nazi concentration camps, slavery in the plantation systems, townships in apartheid South Africa, occupied Palestine, and the colonies. In the context of this thesis' grounded analysis of Waray

women survivors living in sites of colonial encounters, the chronic crisis of everyday poverty, and at the front lines of intensifying storms, how are disasters also deathscapes?

Giroux makes a powerful case for applying Mbembe's necropolitical framework for analyzing deathscapes in the context of disasters and the 'killability' of Hurricane Katrina's victims in New Orleans (2006). Given the pervasiveness of neoliberalism's corporate ethic and market-based fundamentalism, logics which are also deeply attached to the racist policies U.S. politics, Hurricane Katrina revealed how white America viewed its Black cities and spaces as colonial outposts that require a constant military presence, criminalizing and punishing those who are dependent on the welfare state. Contributing scholars in *Racing the Storm* have also examined the criminalization of African Americans' survival tactics, the typology of citizenship in the U.S. during a disaster, the links between the privatization of warfare and the privatization of disaster, among other racist neoliberal projects (Potter, 2007). State abandonment in the Gulf Region prior to Hurricane Katrina have also been examined by scholars to underscore the structural injustices underlying disasters (Jones-DeWeever & Hartman, 2006; Hartman & Squires, 2006). Giroux draws robust connections linking the drying up of public funds and the weakening of the welfare state with the State's war on terror, all of which also contribute to the formation of different deathscapes. The U.S. State unleashed racist narratives to justify its neglect and inability to protect its citizens, differentiating those who belong and those who are excluded within the nation-state and therefore condemned for social death. He argues that while the U.S. sends troops to the Middle East, defends 'homeland security', and expands industrial prison complexes, it is paradoxically unable to save and protects its own citizens in the catastrophe of Katrina.

Disaster deathscapes in the context of the Global South could be examined in similar ways. The report published by IBON Foundation in June 2015 details a comprehensive review of post-

Yolanda relief, recovery and rehabilitation efforts. It argues that government neglect and corporate capitalism are the culprits for upheaving waves of disaster upon disaster on the victims, detailing the State's criminal negligence, the prevalence of corruption and patronage politics, and the making of Yolanda as "the world's most militarized disaster response" (IBON Foundation, 2005, p. 63). The report is valuable for also drawing on other disaster contexts to examine cases of disaster capitalism and the bureaucratic failures of State mechanisms. The neoliberalization of disaster response is for example documented in the use of the "Build Back Better" slogan by the Philippine government for post-Yolanda reconstruction, which is a foreign aid mechanism that promotes corporate-led and investment-driven efforts which were also previously observed after the 2005 earthquake in Kashmir and Cyclone Nargis of 2008 in Myanmar (IBON Foundation, Inc., 2015, p. 70), the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 (Lévesque, 2013), and across coastal communities impacted by the 2004 tsunami (ActionAid International, 2008).

The securitization of fear by the Sri Lankan government and humanitarian aid agencies as written about by feminist geographer, Jennifer Hyndman, similarly illustrates how sovereignty is able to wage a power to grant life and death over bodies which are made less and othered by racial discourses. Hyndman examines the politics of fear by first tracing the buffer zones sanctioned by the government as geographies of fear, and secondly by linking international aid to international geopolitical fears of conflict and aid (2007). By laying out the Sri Lankan political landscape mired by ethnic conflict between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil minority, Hyndman proceeds to argue for how the implementation of buffer zones perpetuated previous patterns of discrimination and yet again displaced those already previously displaced: "The war, the tsunami, and the buffer zone response each constitute a layer, or moment, of displacement" (2007, p. 365). The discriminatory nature of government assistance based on notions of citizenship and ethnicity is also well

documented in Gamburd's ethnographic research in post-tsunami Sri Lanka (2014, pp. 177-192). In addition, aid policy is also increasingly aligned with issues of insecurity and instability: "The mobilization of fears that the 'Third World' will leak into the 'First World' has become a compelling way to frame development assistance as a foreign policy and security issue" (Ibid, p. 367). Hyndman's argument for securitized fear as a necropolitical force, determining whose life values more and whose life values less, and exposing how militarized nationalism and racial discourses spatialize fear are useful in analyzing post-Yolanda cases of second-wave dispossession by government policies. The implementation of "No Build Zones", which was a policy widely implemented in coastal areas in India, Sri Lanka and Thailand affected by the tsunami (IBON Foundation, Inc., 2015, p. 72) was justified by the Philippine State as a safety precaution to protect people from hazards. This zoning policy, however, perpetuates disaster capitalism and will lead to the permanent displacement of an estimated 252,688 fishing households from their coastal communities and ecologies, while corporations are allowed to build and reconstruct commercial establishments in these very same zones (Ibid).

Racialized Women & Disasters

In *Catastrophe and Culture*, Oliver-Smith and Hoffman among other disaster anthropologists argue for the urgency of why anthropologists should study disasters: "not all communities experience a disaster in the same way or the same degree as each undergoes a catastrophe in the context of its own profile of vulnerability" (2002, p. 13). Scholars of applied anthropology working in the contexts of disaster, the authors argue, ultimately need to ask syncretic questions addressing the intersections across sociocultural, physical, biological and ecological systems. Inquiries may include examining the cultural perception of disaster events by a community; how culture and society affect and are changed by disaster events; how and why

vulnerabilities are maintained or even repeated after disaster events; and the intersectional interplay of gender, race, class, age and disability in disaster events (Oliver-Smith, 1996; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999; 2002). In particular, feminist disaster scholars and practitioners, some of whom have training in anthropology, have examined how and why gender considerations are significant in examining disasters, disaster risks and vulnerabilities, disaster response and preparedness, and disaster risk reduction (Enarson & Dhar Chakrabarti, 2009; Enarson & Morrow, 1997; Oxfam Philippines, 2014; Demetriades & Esplen, 2008; Neumayer & Plümper, 2007; Oxfam International, 2005). The field offers ways to theorize how beyond the notion of a ‘natural’ or ‘man-made’ disaster, risk is also culturally produced and perceived as argued by scholars in *Cultures and Disasters* (Krüger, Bankoff, Cannon, Orłowski, & Schipper, 2015).

The works by prominent feminist disaster anthropologist, Elaine Enarson, have laid the groundwork for examining gender in multidisciplinary and cross-cultural studies of disaster contexts. *The Gendered Terrain of Disasters* (Enarson & Morrow, 1998) and *Women, Gender and Disaster* (Enarson & Dhar Chakrabarti, 2009) among her many publications span over two decades of analyzing gendered vulnerabilities, which is arguably still lacking in the field of disaster studies. Drawing on intersectional feminist analysis, Enarson frames women’s vulnerabilities to disasters as such: “Gendered vulnerability does not derive from a single factor, such as household hardship or poverty, but reflects historically and culturally specific patterns of relations in social institutions, culture and personal lives. Intersecting with economic, racial and other inequalities, these relationships create hazardous social conditions placing different groups of women differently at risk when disastrous events unfold” (1998, p. 159). Enarson’s call for more research projects nearly a decade ago—not excluding ethnographic portraits to examine patterns of gendered violence, oral histories and narratives focusing on power relations and indigenous knowledges—remain relevant

today, and has been taken on by a growing field of feminist studies by both practitioners and academicians of disasters.

Contributing scholars in *There Is No Such Thing As A Natural Disaster* (Hartman & Squires, 2006) offer compelling research for employing intersectional analysis in examining how Hurricane Katrina in 2005 impacted peoples according to gender, race and class disparities in the Gulf Region. Focusing on gender in disasters is insufficient. A feminist lens is urgently needed to examine multiple identities and locations that generate unequal power relations. Hyndman investigates the dynamics of conflict and disaster that create displaced populations, and draws on feminist thought to examine women in the context of armed conflict and post-tsunami Sri Lanka arguing for how socially constructed gendered caregiver and labour roles, including women's ethnic and religious identities, have pre-positioned them in spaces of greater vulnerability in relation to the tsunami. (2008). By elaborating on how security is geographical and also social, Hyndman contributes to the larger efforts of de-naturalizing disasters, and argues that the "struggles over interethnic justice, neoliberalism, economic distribution, the disempowerment of women, caste bigotry and such have shaped the Sri Lankan political landscape in significant ways over the last decades even the tsunami cannot wipe out the imprint of these fault lines" (Ibid, p. 105).

Research on women survivors in post-tsunami Tamil Nadu similarly argues that the origins of gendered vulnerabilities are by no means biologically determined but are socially constructed: women survivors' disproportionately greater vulnerability in terms of mortality, access to aid and rehabilitation resources, conditions at temporary shelters, experience of sexualized violence, and health are by no means natural conditions but are products of patriarchal socio-political injustices (Juran, 2012). Similarly, research on women survivors of the 2005 Pakistan earthquake argue that

the elite and patriarchal Pakistani State and the cultural behavior of blaming women for social misfortunes are the main causes for the violation of women's rights as seen in the lack of security in tent villages, discriminatory access to relief, shelter and health services, both in the everyday and in the aftermath of the earthquake (Sayeed, 2009). Oxfam International's report on how women were affected by the 2004 tsunami which decimated 12 Southeast Asian countries, killing over 220,000 people and displacing 1.6 million, reveal that there was a disproportionate death toll among women due to their location such as caring for children at home in Aceh, waiting on the shore for fishermen to return in India, or bathing by the sea in the Batticaloa District of Sri Lanka (2005). These findings are echoed in Oxfam Philippines' report *Women After the Storm* which outlines the gendered vulnerabilities experienced by women survivors of super typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines (2014). This includes heightened vulnerability to sexual and gender-based violence which were perpetuated in certain circumstances by the police, military, humanitarian workers and government officers themselves in the aftermath. By drawing from literature on disaster studies (Enarson & Morrow, 1997; 1998; Bankoff, 2003; 2004) and by practitioners, Valerio who served as a gender-based violence coordinator in Tacloban City argues that the experiences of Yolanda women survivors are similar with women survivors of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina in the Gulf Region, reinstating that women remain to be one of the most vulnerable populations in disaster deathscapes.

Resisting Disaster Deathscapes

In a review of her pioneering article "Under Western Eyes" (1991) over a decade later, postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty reasserts the critique of Western feminism's discursive colonization of the 'Third World', but also provides a new emphasis on the connections and possibilities for solidarities in and between North/South and One-Third/Two-

Third Worlds (2003). In response to what Mohanty refers to as the postmodernist misreading of her work as the valorization of difference between Western and Third World, she now repositions her writing to be “*under and inside* Western eyes” as a South Asian scholar in the U.S. This challenges the false ideological and geographical binaries and argues for how the West reconfigures itself globally, racially, and in terms of gender across borders. I argue that such analysis makes possible to highlight the dispossession of First Nations through the racist formations of the Indian reserves and the invasion of extractive industries in Canada, the ghettoization and neglect of Black communities in the U.S., and to consider them alongside the marginalization of the Eastern Visayas to take the brunt of super typhoons in the Philippines. Mohanty’s essay also urgently re-centers *racialized gender*—“poor women of all colors in affluent and neocolonial nations; women of the Third World/South or the Two-Third World” (Ibid, p. 510)—as marginalized communities to continuously pay attention to, work with, and theorize from about social justice. In light of today’s global capitalist hegemony, increasing militarization, religious fundamentalism, deeply masculinist, misogynist and racist logics embedded in neoliberal projects, outlined by Giroux and previously cited authors on the injustices constructing disaster deathscapes, how else could feminist politics also inform the discourse on climate justice? And more importantly re-centre the voices and lives of racialized women in disaster contexts?

To answer the inquiry of how women survivors respond to disasters, feminist sociologist Marilyn Childs writes “Not Through Women’s Eyes” (2006) to critically appraise the representation of women in photo-essays published by international aid agencies online following the 2004 tsunami disaster. Childs argues that representations of women in disaster photography constructed a particular view of them which ultimately “engenders passivity”, “domesticates women’s grief”, “thus making invisible to public perception the lived realities of women’s

resilience, their contributions to disaster response, their ongoing exposure to human violence and unequal aid and care, and their need to labor” (Ibid, p. 203). The title is a reference to Enarson’s pioneering article, arguing for how women’s full agency is often negated by humanitarian aid agencies, mass media, and the State. “Women were not shown in relationship to livelihoods, employment, or land... [and] not [as] community decision-makers. Women were shown as passive, often sitting or standing, gazing or waiting, wandering standing. Yet men were” (Ibid, p. 209). Childs’s visual analysis could be used to support arguments for recognizing women survivors’ voices and action.

There is a violence incurred when those who live in death-worlds are relegated to nothing but death and despair. Other scholars have also served to trouble women’s victimhood with agency and possibilities for resistance within disaster deathscapes. Murakami-Ramalho and Durodoye for instance examine the experiences and stories of Black women who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina from New Orleans and were resettled in San Antonio Texas (2008). Their work aims to provide perspectives and meanings of resettlement from women survivors who are at the intersections of racism and sexism, with the aim of shifting the attention away from sensationalized media reports of rescue, and to highlight instead women’s loss, agency, resilience, and dynamism. Morioka’s ethnographic piece also centers on the lives of Japanese mothers post the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami in March 2011, whose activism successfully pressured local governments to monitor nuclear radiation levels (Morioka, 2013). A Japanese sociologist, Morioka argues for how cultural norms, beliefs and values shape gendered roles in Japanese society—both empowering and constraining women’s agency for social change. Her writing de-essentializes the women’s courage to organize and take political action and instead frames ‘mother courage’ as a response to State and corporate-sanctioned masculine ideals.

Although there may be abundant literature documenting the increase of violence against women in the aftermath of disasters, Fisher writes that less has been produced reporting the roles women play in disaster reduction, response and recovery. The case study on Sri Lankan women's organizations responding to post-tsunami violence first outlines the cases of violence against women, and proceeds to detail the series of responses to the violence by local grassroots women's organizations such as the Coalition for Assisting Tsunami Affected Women (CATAW) and the Women's Coalition for Disaster Management (WCDM) (Fisher, 2009). Responses include forming local level alliances for monitoring, fact finding missions, information gathering and dissemination, capacity building of women's groups, and programs to create and restore women's livelihoods. Fisher does well to redirect attention from the predominant focus on international NGOs and humanitarian aid agencies to the action of grassroots alliance among disaster survivors. These findings prove that local women's activism serve as critical agents of social change, more so when these organizations have been pre-established to address gender and human rights issues prior to disasters. This argument supports the case for the conflation of social and climate justice claims (similarly argued for by Fisher 2015), when the climate change lens is insufficient to expose pre-existing development challenges and injustices.

Black feminist writer bell hooks theorizes about the margins as spaces of oppression and deprivation but also as a "profound edge" which one could choose to inhabit as a radical site for resistance (hooks, 1990). She is careful not to romantically reinscribe binaries to separate oppressor and oppressed, and instead argued for how struggle can be within one's self and communities, ultimately revealing an interdependence between centre and margin as parts of a whole—this awareness, hooks writes, can be known by those in the peripheries who are able to look in from outside and look out from within. This text, read alongside Mohanty's work, are

crucial for scholarship and activism done by and with racialized women. Both scholars fervently challenge the margins as spaces only of despair which breeds a deep nihilism and annihilates the ‘other’. Instead, just as hooks calls this article an intervention, my own research with Waray women in the context of Super Typhoon Yolanda must also pay attention to the women’s voices, acts of resistance, joys and desires in the marginal spaces of deathscapes.

‘Our survival is non-negotiable!’: Climate Justice Movements in the Philippines

In the immediate aftermath of Yolanda, I attended a number of interagency forum by ad hoc coalitions in Manila along with countless other emergency relief workers. At the height of the logistical chaos, finger-pointing and blaming among politicians in a national state of emergency, practitioners of disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM) in the country lamented the State’s weak capacity to coordinate multilateral response efforts across the Visayan region. “We simply cannot prepare for people to die!”, an expert in DRRM and urban planning exclaimed furiously. Three days after Yolanda’s first landfall, the world watched the news coverage of former Philippine climate negotiator, Naderev ‘Yeb’ Saño, weeping as he spoke on behalf of the delegation at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change or COP19 in Warsaw. He was the first chief negotiator to declare a fast in opposition to the international political inaction and weak lack of political will at the negotiations while Filipinos mourned and buried our dead. He is popularly quoted today by grassroots movements for declaring: “My country refuses to accept a future where super typhoons become a way of life” (Democracy Now!, 2013). Saño resigned from his diplomatic position as the Commissioner of the Philippines’ Climate Change Commission in April 2015 to serve instead as an ambassador for Our Voices (2015), a global ecumenical campaign among communities impacted by climate change. He joined the 1,000 kilometer Climate Walk on foot by activists from Manila to Tacloban City in November 2014 to

commemorate Yolanda's first year anniversary. This monumental march was supported by Greenpeace Philippines, the DAKILA Philippine Collective for Modern Heroism, among others.

Fisher challenges the notion of 'climate justice' as understood in the context of international negotiations among nation-states, and argues instead for the need to be more attentive to emerging geographies of climate justice in the Global South. In these spaces, Fisher argues based on her fieldwork in India and participation in COP15 in Copenhagen, climate change is interlaced with questions of uneven development processes and environmental concerns (2015). The article concludes that although climate change is indeed a stress multiplier for development challenges including caste inequities and environmental degradation, it is *not* the only cause for justice claims: "The isolation and rescaling of climate justice as an international issue with solutions between nation-states can lead to its separation from the pressing concerns of Indian activists or social movements, as well as losing agency and possible solutions" (Ibid, p. 80). I believe that this article is particularly timely given the recent culmination of COP21 in Paris and the increasing conflation of foreign policy with disaster aid. Fisher's fieldwork provides rich and tangible understanding of local articulations of everyday survival struggles by marginalized communities in India, which may or may not employ a 'climate change lens' nor align with global narratives of environmental activism. I consider this an important intervention even among global climate justice movements which claim to speak for impacted communities albeit with a different vocabulary to 'upscale' local voices and knowledges.

The Philippine Movement for Climate Justice (2015), a broad movement convening over 100 national networks which represent the most vulnerable sectors of society, has been active all across the archipelago for decades working on a multitude of advocacies, community organizing initiatives, and activisms. Fr. Edwin Gariguez, a prominent Filipino environmentalist and

Executive Secretary of the National Secretariat for Social Action, Justice and Peace, has served an important role in exposing cases of disaster capitalism post Yolanda. The coalition's consistent commitment to work with communities impacted by extractive industries, disasters, and other violence underscores the inextricable connections across development aggression by corporate capitalism, assimilationist and nationalist policies by the State, which are then all compounded by disasters. In the context of Philippine communities at the frontline of climate change, climate science is not necessary for framing their vulnerabilities; instead, social justice remains the most relevant framework for outlining the chronic crises brought about by poverty and ongoing colonial forces.

Two years after Yolanda, heads of states reconvened in the United Nations Climate Change Conference or COP21 in Paris for negotiating and signing the final global agreement on the reduction of climate change. With eight out of the 10 most disaster-prone cities in the Philippines, the country served as the chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) which is a bloc of 20 countries most vulnerable to intensifying weather conditions; it was similarly a member of the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) which are most threatened by rising sea levels. Alongside members of both blocs, the Philippine delegation fought hard to negotiate for a 1.5°C target, arguing that a 2°C rise in global temperatures is too late for hundreds of millions of people in the Global South. While rounds of negotiations ensued, Yeb Saño and the People's Pilgrimage (2015) arrived in Paris and completed the expedition on foot from Rome which invited supporters from all across the world to call for climate action. A multitude of Filipino climate justice activists joined crowds of protesters in the streets while the climate talks were kept in enclosed buildings with the highest levels of security.

Meanwhile in the Visayan islands, the broadest alliance of Yolanda survivors in the Eastern Visayas, the People Surge (2015), marched to Tacloban City. At Yolanda’s ‘ground zero’, bold letters were taped on to their large colourful woven banners and spelled: “*DI MAPAPALIT AN AMON KABUHI!*” Their battle cry in Waray translates as: “Our survival is non-negotiable!” [Figure 2]. In solidarity with migrant activists for climate justice in Canada including members of the Philippine diaspora, People Surge published an open letter addressed to the newly elected Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, on November 13, 2015 clamouring for Canada to commit to clean energy, pay its climate debt, and to reform its immigration policies for climate refugees [Figure 3]. Perhaps when more climate justice movements led by communities in the Global South, by people of colour, and Indigenous communities hold industrialized nations accountable for climate change impacts, the predominant representations of hurricanes and super typhoons as random acts of nature can be challenged by the very communities at the front lines of such violent forces.



Figure 2: Banner of People Surge Alliance for Disaster Survivors in the Philippines
Source: <https://peoplesurgephils.wordpress.com>



Figure 3: An Open Letter from Survivors of Climate Catastrophe in the Philippines, November 13, 2015
Source: <https://ricochet.media/en/744/dear-prime-minister-trudeau-our-survival-is-non-negotiable>

Scholar of disasters in the Philippines, Greg Bankoff, argues that narratives of vulnerability to climate change and ‘natural’ disasters are inherently Western discourses which originate from colonial renderings of danger incurred by ‘us’ versus ‘them’, and should instead be reframed as cultural discourses exposing the chronic crises lived by people in their everyday lives (2003, pp. 5-17). He highlights the need to investigate ‘cultures of disasters’ in place of examining natural disasters because “less than adequate attention has been directed to considering the historical roots of the discursive framework within which hazard is generally presented, and how that might reflect particular cultural values to do with certain regions or zones of the world are usually imagined” (Ibid, p. 5). Cynthia Banzon-Bautista, alongside other Filipino scholars of disasters, similarly challenge the mainstream discourse on a disaster being “a chance phenomenon, a rare event which lasts for a few seconds or a few days [and that] its effects are localized and seldom does it figure in the everyday life of a people or a nation” (Bautista C. , 2000, p. xvi). Their scholarship on the monumental Mt. Pinatubo eruption of 1991, *In the Shadow of the Lingering Mt. Pinatubo* (2000), underscore the clear connections between vulnerability and the poor’s political, socio-economic and geographic marginalization, including how survivors cope with and struggle against lahar on

a daily basis.

In line with the need to pay nuanced attention to local socio-cultural contexts, feminist community development worker, Junice Melgar, reports on the power of Waray women to transform places of devastation in the wake of Yolanda, acknowledging that the region of Eastern Visayas had always been a “bastion of people power” with a long history of organized movements such as the New People’s Army (Oxfam Philippines, 2014, p. 48). Women survivors from Eastern Samar reported their experiences of gendered discrimination by government officials and their frustration with bureaucratic top-down approaches employed by humanitarian agencies. In response, with the assistance of local civil society organizations and allies such as Oxfam Philippines, women survivors have organized themselves to address physical and psychological relief, responding to over a thousand cases of reproductive health concerns, and the establishment of community vegetable gardens for food security and livelihood concerns across 42 *barangays*. Such actions and the creation of all-women spaces, reports Melgar, are of crucial importance in not only addressing post-Yolanda concerns but longstanding issues of social injustices in the region.

It is crucial to note that not all acts of resistance appear in the form of organized political movements. Everyday acts of survivance do exist, most especially among those made most vulnerable and marginalized in such topographies of struggle. The Waray women survivors who I lived and worked with have taught me that they refuse to die away, and most certainly refuse to live in deathscapes. Their survival narratives resist such confinements and instead actively challenge the limits of what it means to live with an ancient ferocity.

IV. ***Pakikipag-Pulso (Pulse-Taking Together) as Ethnography: Feminist and Decolonizing Ethnographic Research at the Wake of Super Typhoon Yolanda***

Chapter 4 details the conduct of this on-site feminist ethnographic research in the town of Palo in the summer of 2015. I first trace my intellectual genealogies by positioning my work as informed by movements of feminist and decolonizing scholarship which have emerged all across the postcolonial world. I then draw on the methods offered by Sikolohiyang Pilipino or Indigenous Philippine Psychology to theorize on pakikipag-pulso (pulse-taking together) as ethnography: research as relationships, relatedness and responsibility in the context of disaster. I write in the same thick description I journalled with in my field notes, and with a mindfulness needed in participant observation. I similarly employ reflexivity to articulate and problematize my positionality, as advocated for by feminist scholarship. This chapter concludes by exploring the potentials for writing ethnographies in Philippine disaster contexts with the pursuit of solidarity for social and climate justice.

Taking My Own Pulse

In her book *Dancing On Our Turtle's Back*, Leanne Simpson explores how the Nishnaabeg language, Creation Stories and philosophies offer ways of resurgence for Indigenous peoples' struggles. Her chapter on theorizing resurgence from within Nishnaabeg thought argues that while feminists have long debated whether or not "the master's tools can dismantle the master's house"—quoting Black feminist Audre Lorde's key inquiry in the liberation of historically colonized and racialized peoples—Simpson instead writes that she is interested in a different question: "I am not so concerned with how we dismantle the master's house, that is, which sets of theories we use to critique colonialism; but I am very concerned with how we (re)build our own house, our own houses" (2011, p. 32). At the heart of my own scholarship, activism and artistic endeavors I understand that I too share her core purpose: I am most committed to learning how I can help rebuild our own houses, after centuries of storms. This intent inspires my labour: writing to theorize from our own ways of being, our own mother tongues, acknowledging that indeed *we know* how best to rebuild our washed out villages, how to care for one another's survival even as intensifying storms are unleashed our way.

After working for seven full months from November 2013 to June 2014 as an emergency relief worker assigned to multiple sites across the Visayan region, I felt my life force drained away. It was not physical exhaustion which was easily compensated and numbed by an ever-increasing adrenaline rush in responding to people's immediate survival, but an exhaustion caused by angry frustration at the failings of rotten bureaucracies, by grief at the face of horrific devastation, and by an overwhelming despair at how little our actions achieved to redress such enormous injustices. According to the Canadian international student visas on my Philippine passport, my return to the City of Vancouver in September 2015 was the pursuit of a second academic degree. This time, however, I understood that returning to the traditional and unceded Coast Salish territories was an educated middle-class Filipina's deeper—and privileged—longing for rest and refuge. As I embarked on a graduate program to re-examine life in our island-nations at the eye of an ever-growing storm spurred by climate change in neocolonial times, I surrounded myself primarily with the writings of women of colour, Indigenous scholars from Turtle Island and beyond to learn from them on 'how to do the work'. Among Simpson's writings on my pillow, I too kept Alice Walker close by, who teaches me to pray, saying: "Everything we love can be saved." I also stayed near to bell hooks' pages written on the powers of love and yearning. On the cover of Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) is a photograph of a woman ancestor from the Philippine islands, always looking by me. I have been mentored by *Research Is Ceremony* by Opaskwayak Cree father and researcher, Shawn Wilson (2008), and refreshed by the ease and poetics of *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013), a scientist and mother from the Potawatomi Nation. This chapter on methods is the product of my efforts in theorizing about the praxis of ethnographic research, as taught by the many teachers I cite and bring together in this section.

Tracing My Intellectual Genealogies

One cannot assume that struggles by women of colour are necessarily ‘feminist’, a term of Western origins which may not characterize the nature of non-Western women’s collective struggles, whether formally ‘organized’ in a movement or not. Similarly, there have been remarkable resistance among Indigenous women in taking up the ‘feminist’ framework as a resolution to their struggles and resurgence movements. Contributors in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2007) who are predominantly Indigenous women situated within the Global North expound on the earlier rejection of feminism as the term is associated with mainstream white liberal feminism. A feminist agenda is also not necessarily decolonizing as such feminist libertarian agendas may be complicit in the State’s ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples from ancestral territories, disregarding Indigenous women’s ‘double oppression’ by the State and patriarchy. Although there are undeniably shared histories of struggles against colonialism, imperialism racism, and sexism among all non-Western peoples—which postcolonial feminist Chandra Mohanty writes as “the continuity between the ‘Native’ (male) and the ‘Third World Woman’” as objectified subjects by anthropological discourses (1991, p. 32)—I argue that feminist ethnographic methods also need to be complimented by decolonizing methods as theorized by Indigenous and non-Western scholars. The conduct of my fieldwork in the island of Leyte hopes to illustrate these intersections.

“From the vantage point of the colonized, a position from which I write, and choose to privilege, the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, p. 1). In the Western historical context which the university I write from is located, the field of indigenous knowledge and research as defined by the conventions of Western

academic institutions was a relatively recent endeavor during the 1970s. Decades later, the publication of *Decolonizing Methodologies* by Tuhiwai Smith in 1999 contributed significantly in the field's gaining popularity. *Research Is Ceremony*, which I draw from in writing about the practice of my own research methods, followed suit in 2013. By sharing his life story, alternating between addressing the reader and his sons, including the many voices of his Elders, family members and other scholars, Wilson invites us into an 'extra-intellectual' understanding of 'how' to conduct research: one in which relationships are at the heart of the work, and wherein knowledge in itself is sacred and fundamentally relational. "The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or build the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world" (Wilson, 2008, pp. 11, 137).

Similar movements to decolonize academic scholarship, research and knowledges spread all across the postcolonial world beginning in the 1970s. African scholars began writing to reclaim and position African philosophies of the self as did Ugandan poet Okot p'Bikek (1973), to theorize on liberation in the literary works of Guinea-Bissauan nationalist writer Amílcar Cabral (Cabral & Davidson, 1979), and among many others through waves of cultural revolutions. Parallel movements to indigenize a variety of disciplines also ensued in Latin America, with the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) championed by Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, alongside liberation theology by revolutionary Jesuits, and liberation psychology as did Ignacio Martín-Baró in the 1980s (Martín-Baró, Chomsky, & Abarca, 1998) among many other scholar-activists. Across the Asian continent, similar movements took on the bold pursuits of talking back to empire, and to challenge the very Western institutions which non-Western scholars have been trained in, laboring and theorizing for liberatory movements. In the Philippine context, the indigenization of the social

sciences was propelled across multiple disciplines. Historians were re-writing the archive as histories of a people's liberation (Constantino, 1975), search for identity and consciousness (Ibid, 1974) and anti-colonial resistance movements (Guerrero, 1981) as 'histories from below'. Anthropologists pursued questions of what local values, knowledges and cultural paradigms are (Jocano, 1975; 1997), and theorized on cultural revitalization (Covar, 1973) as decolonizing pursuits.

The pioneering work of Virgilio G. Enriquez founded *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* or Indigenous Philippine Psychology in 1975. His publications *Indigenous Psychology* (Enriquez, 1990) and *From Colonial to Liberation Psychology* (Enriquez, 1992) laid out a response to decolonize what he argued to be the Americanization of a 'Filipino psyche' or *kamalayan*. *Sikolohiyang Pilipino's* three primary areas of protest are to espouse *sikolohiyang malaya*, a psychology liberated from the internal colonization of the Filipino mind; to shift the focus of research from theory to a clear application in serving the marginalized; and to promote a *sikolohiyang mapagpalaya* or a liberating psychology which denounces the use of elitist pursuits for the exploitation of masses (Ibid, p. 33). In its pursuit to explain lived realities in the Philippines from the 'Filipino' perspective, the field upholds the use of local languages as a tool for the identification and theorizing of indigenous concepts which are contrasted from Western models that are invariably unable to articulate, accurately explain, or consider the collective experiences of a consciousness they do not share.

With its inception originating from the nationalist pursuits of the 1970s, *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* scholars, however, were predominantly male and have been critiqued for promoting a false ideal of a national or pan-archipelagic 'Filipino' consciousness which anthropologists may easily refute given their nuanced attention to localized cultural contexts. The same critique and caution against essentializing and reaffirming new modes of ethnocentrism were applicable to

other scholars across the non-Western world. The argument that certain values, ways of being and relating are shared across the entire nation has since been problematized, in a similar vein that a monolithic category of ‘Third World Women’ have been challenged by postcolonial feminists. However, for the purpose of this chapter, I will outline how methods proposed by *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* were applied in the conduct of this fieldwork and similarly cross with other Indigenous research methods.

Indigenous knowledges across the world are transmitted intergenerationally, stored in people’s memories and cultural practices, and shared and communicated through oral traditions among other forms of intergenerational knowledge sharing (Chilisa, 2012, p. 99). An Indigenous research paradigm is characterized by the following aspects:

- Ontology: Reality is understood in the relationships one has with others, the land, cosmos, and truth, with reality being defined as relationships or sets of relationships;
- Epistemology: Knowing is something that is socially constructed by people in relationship with one another, with the relationship being more important than an object of knowing;
- Methodology: Methods used for knowing serve the purpose of building more relations;
- Axiology: Ethical responsibility is to ensure respectful and reciprocal relationships (Wilson, 2008) (Chilisa, 2012).

Filipino/as in the global diaspora who espouse to indigenize academic scholarship also ground their work from a research paradigm that is profoundly relational [Figure 4]. Publications

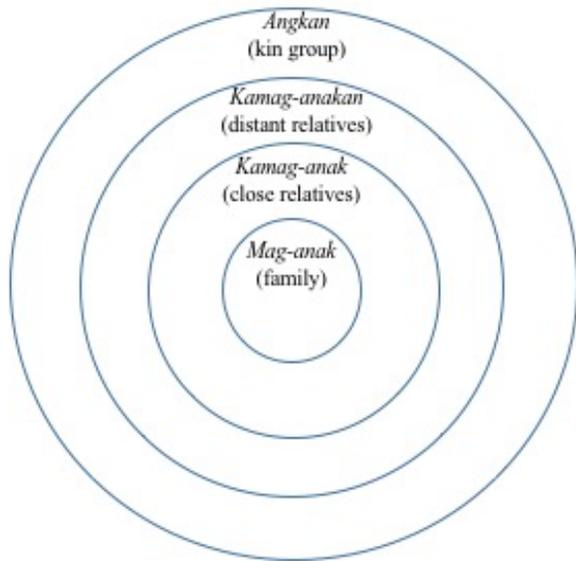


Figure 4: Filipino Kinship Structure (Enriquez 1990, p. 38)

by the Center for Babaylan Studies such as *Babaylan: Filipinos and the Call of the Indigenous* (Strobel, 2010) and *Back from the Crocodile's Belly* (Mendoza & Strobel, 2013) continuously 'struggle for indigenous memory' and decolonization through multiple ways of remembering relations. Contributing scholars in these endeavors who are both in the Philippines and in the diaspora similarly trace their intellectual

genealogies to Enriquez and *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*. As the following section illustrates, I too view 'researcher' and 'participants' not to be disparate selves but as individuals located within these concentric rings which radiate to larger sense of selves.

Pakikipag-Pulso (Pulse-Taking Together)

My return to the island of Leyte exactly one year after I resigned from emergency relief work was guided by one clear intention [Figure 5]. Folding and putting aside all the paperwork produced from the university, research proposals and ethics review applications included, I travelled to ask: "*Kamusta na po kayo?*" [How are you now?] I wanted to understand, respectfully, how people were one year after the super typhoon. It was insufficient to do so by monitoring the government's trickled disbursement of foreign aid, nor by simply reading published reports from international and local non-government organizations. I felt a strong need to even suspend or put aside all academic literature I have read prior to the fieldwork in order to prepare my mind to learn first from what is to be revealed by the place and its people. I knew that to truly understand how

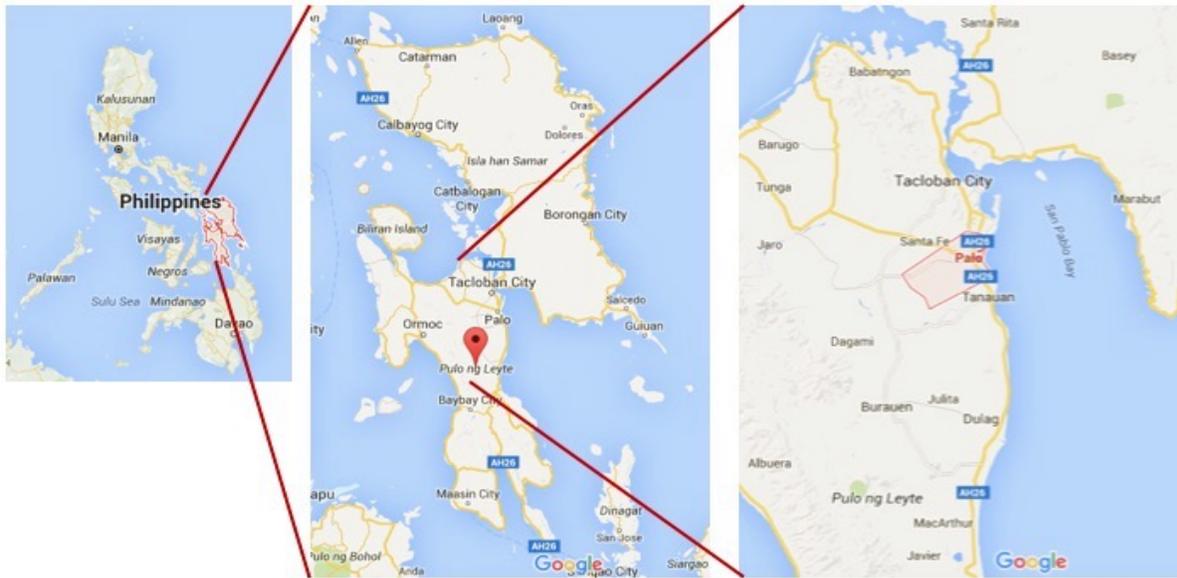


Figure 5: Map of Palo, Leyte Island, Philippines

people were, their fears, concerns, and priorities, I had to place myself, my body back into the place. Only with physical presence could I take the people's pulse, with them.

Fieldwork was a return, and also a first-time homecoming. The town of Palo was familiar grounds because each time I travelled to Leyte to conduct relief aid, the flight from Manila would land in Tacloban City, and Palo would be the first town our hired vehicle or jeepney would pass through. For everyone who rushed to Leyte for emergency response, the Palo Cathedral was an iconic landmark with its ripped roofs overlooking all the shaken houses below and around it. It stood at the *poblacion's* main junction where diverging roads turned to the neighbouring towns. There was where we witnessed body bags piled for burial in a mass grave. The town of Palo is also where my great maternal grandmother is from: where she was born and baptized, where her sister and their families grew up, and where they grew their families. As migration from Leyte and other provinces to Manila had been common since the 1950s, Lola Teresa married a Chinese immigrant she met in the capital, and there she gave birth. She died when my grandmother was a little girl, and since her passing, my grandmother and her children and her grandchildren later were

raised as Tagalog-speaking *tsinoys* or Filipinos of Chinese heritage in Manila. A few other family members from Palo had migrated to Manila decades ago, and we grew up knowing Aunty Noemi, my grandmother's younger cousin the most; the rest of our extended families in Palo, however, we did not remain in touch with until after super typhoon Yolanda. Fieldwork was my opportunity to meet all of them.

My mother decided to fly with me to Leyte on my first time to meet the family. This was “the right thing to do”, we both agreed, so she could meet everyone in person too while helping introduce me to kin and together we would make sense of the family trees as she knew more about them than I did. “Aunty Nilda, you are still as beautiful as ever!” my mother exclaimed when she and Lola Nilda squealed and hugged each other tight at the Tacloban airport. Lola Nilda, who is my grandmother's cousin and the older sister of Aunty Noemi, lived in Manila for a time when she was a young woman. She would walk my mother to school every morning, and help the little school girl with homework. Lola Nilda's penmanship in perfected script—A's, B's, C's swirling smooth on pad paper lined with blue-red-blue lines—was the most beautiful in my mother's memory, as much as she was always remembered as the aunt with a beautiful gentle face. When Lola Nilda married she returned to Palo and have not seen my mother and her siblings regularly in the decades that followed. Lola Nilda lives in their ancestral home, a small bungalow that still bore planks of hardwood floor patched up now with thinner sheets of coco lumber and kept dry by thatched iron sheets. Together with her husband, three children, and six grandchildren, they live in their tight quarters. They survived Yolanda and the yearly floods in Barangay San Miguel, the lowest ground level of the surrounding watershed. They are now experts in packing clothes and food items in tight locked plastic bins for speedy evacuation.

“*Apo ni Ate Remi!*” (The grandchild of elder sister Remi!)—that is how my arrival was announced in their homes, to their neighbors and friends [see Annex for family tree created by Lola Filea]. It was a mix of delight and amazement at the unexpected return of their elder sister Remedios’ granddaughter from Manila, their elder sister Remi who was the daughter of an uncle they remembered as Tio Jose Co Cheng Yok. Not only are visitors from Manila welcomed with a certain excitement in rural towns—these visits from cosmopolitan urbanites are often associated with an importance of social and economic capital—but also this young woman who studies in Canada was an exceptionally rare visit. Such was the importance of introductions or *pagpapakilala*, which is introducing one’s identity and making one’s presence known. This is followed with *pagtanggap* or being welcomed, received and recognized. One cannot truly arrive without these protocols. In the *barangay* or village context where everyone absolutely knew everyone else, where the stories and relations of every house lined up along the small roads are known to every other house too, it was imperative that a visiting stranger like myself had to be placed in their web of relationships. Relatives did not end with the nuclear family, but extended to include families of aunties and uncles, cousins and their children, in-laws and grandchildren. “*Apo ni Ate Remi*” located me clearly in their relations, and this ensures a foundation rested in some familiarity and therefore also some mutual accountability. While the feminist politics places great emphasis on reflexivity and examining one’s positionality in relation to others, it is the Indigenous research paradigm which ensures that this positionality is located in a web of relationships ensuring reciprocity and responsibility among relations.

In the spirit of *pagpapakilala*, I also took it upon myself in my first week to walk around the neighbourhood. I would not be tempted by pedicab drivers asking to drive passengers to the public market or the town plaza. By being on foot, I knew that I would place myself directly in

encounters and in the place. This way I would notice how high people were building their new bamboo and wooden huts several stories up to mitigate the damage of the annual floods. This way I could see people's homes built by the riverside and how inconceivably close they were to the edge. My body as a measurement for scale and as a tool of perception becomes my very instrument, for knowing and understanding. To other people unrelated to my kin in Palo and to beings we could not see, I wanted to also make my presence known as if I knew that hiding was a lack of honesty and would create more harm. I learned this growing up, playing as a little girl with friends outdoors when we were always taught to say "*tabi-tabi po*", asking to be excused by spirits, dwarves or other beings we do not see in case we might hit them or step on their houses while playing near trees.

"*Ako po'y taga-Maynila.*" (I am from Manila.) "*Relief worker po ako nuon nung Yolanda.*" (I used to be a relief worker during Yolanda.) "*Pitong buwan po ako dito sa Leyte, nakaabot na rin po ng mga isla-isla ng Samar, Cebu, Iloilo.*" (I spent seven months here in Leyte, and also reached the islands of Samar, Cebu, Iloilo.) "*Nangangamusta lang po kung kamusta na tayo ngayon. Nakaraos na po ba?*" (I would like to know how we are all doing now. Have we recovered?) This was how I often would introduce myself in Tagalog, understood by the locals who would also converse with me in Tagalog, mixing phrases in Waray that I took effort in learning over the course of three months. In order to take a people's pulse, I do not only place my fingers over another's wrist to listen; before I do, I need to ask for permission first, asking "*paki*", a kind request, and when allowed, we do it together.

Prior to the conduct of any formalized interviews, I made it an intention to first learn to be with people in the town, especially with the relatives whom I was a homestay with. There was no anxiety to 'get the research started'. *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* scholars offer research methods which

I argue were imperative to my conduct of ethnographic research in Palo. There was an initial need to practice *pakikiramdam*, or a deep sensing and feeling of what is happening in order not to rudely disrupt, and *pakikisama* or frequent intentional interaction with others to build bonds of familiarity and harmony (Church & Katigbak, 2002). This concept of intuition as knowing has also been written about by Latina scholar and educator, Laura Rendón in her book *Sentipensante (Sensing/Thinking) Pedagogy* (2009). She writes that this epistemology was inspired by what Uruguan writer, Eduardo Galeano had reported: “The fisherman of the Colombian coast must be learned doctors of ethics and morality, for they invented the word ‘*sentipensante*’, feeling-thinking, to define language that speaks truth” (Rendón, 2009, p. 121) Similarly, in the coasts of Leyte Island, I offer *pakikipag-pulso* as a similar call to feel-think-be together, where a whole embodied engagement is needed to understand research as relationships, relatedness and responsibility in the context of ongoing disasters. I took this to mean adjusting to the speed of time, which I felt was palpably much slower, like the slow steady beat of hammering nails into coco lumber, patiently raising broken houses higher, a wooden plank at a time, than they were before the waters surged in. This meant accepting invitations to attend household festivities, to hold the mic when invited to sing a song too on karaoke, to eat what is shared and offered, and to re-learn the greeting of ‘*mano po*’—when a younger person asks to hold an elder’s hand up to their forehead in a gesture of blessing. The intentional practice of joining frequent interactions, a social and performative act, are not to be interpreted as insincere efforts; instead these are genuine social practices which build and reinforce relationships, the very methodology of research and ceremony (Wilson, 2008, p. 79). Settling in was also allowing myself the many afternoons lying down inside the bamboo hut that was at the rooftop of Lola Fe’s house, writing in my journal alongside the laundry that were pinned to dry under the noontime heat. These remarkable moments I remember

as the best opportunities to tune in, as if in a listening meditation to the soundscapes all around town, where I could sense and feel everyone's desire to breathe back normalcy into their lives.

As another method offered by *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, there was a similar need to practice *pagtatanung-tanong* or a seemingly casual process of asking around or scoping but with a clear intention of learning from those around you (Pe-Pua, 1990). Conversations shared over the dining table, in the kitchen, while huddled around the TV set for the evening weather report, or squatting outside the house where large plastic basins of laundry were being scrubbed, were all 'data' or important information to learn from. At home I would ask my aunts and extended sisters where the rivers were oriented, what has happened to the neighbor who lost her mother to Yolanda, and what time the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer would be at her desk tomorrow to listen to cases of domestic abuse. I would ask the women walking home with their children after school if they knew the directions to the GABRIELA office, where women members would convene regularly to deliberate concerns from livelihood assistance to the resolution of a rape case filed at the police station last week. "It is a pink building right behind that tree", they said pointing.

Ecological Map

Pakikipag-pulso could also be understood as practicing an awareness of the environment, allowing for the land and the waters to reveal how they are to you too. Prior to my return to Leyte, I did not know what ecological terrain existed beneath the chaotic mountain of debris, garbage, steel bars, rubble and cable wires that covered the towns we tried hard to drive through. The waft of decay that would course our way when the vehicle's windows were rolled down reminded me of how wet the soil, the dark muck that covered the area all around was. Coconut trees had their heads chopped off, but the tall grasses and palms that grew alongside many of the streams and

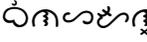
small canals revealed vast marshy areas. The fast and fleeting nature of relief work, however, prevented me from learning better the places we travelled to and through. My return for ethnographic fieldwork allowed for a much slower immersion in the place for new revelations. The same ocean waves that have exploded like bombs of the fiercest winds and waters have calmed down; and the river lines where the sea surged up to drown and wash away entire villages have smoothed back to flow tidily within its banks. Several times, I joined my young aunt, Ate Marielle, and her other friends who were young mothers too to see more of the rivers and streams that flowed through their towns [Figure 6]. It is when we began asking around for someone with a wooden boat to rent, often with children acting as our guides, that we made our way to meet fishing families living deeper in areas where thick nipa palm fronds grew. There I learned that men often tended to their little boats and the women mended nets and cared for children at home. An entire marshland revealed itself: we were in the  Binahaan Watershed, a place that holds much water brought in by floods which explained the countless streams and tributaries that passed through small neighbourhoods where paved roads have not even found their way in. Its very place name—‘*baha*’ meaning flood and ‘*binahaan*’ meaning the place that is flooded—teaches us where we were. These walks on foot and tours in little boats were the only way to understand water, like the feeling of a pulse beat through the land’s veins, including the people whose lives are always so close by them.



Figure 6: Map of three barangays in Palo

The natural flow of water into what is now the town of Palo have been affected by human activity such as the irrigation of farmlands, the digging of more groundwater wells to meet increasing number of households, the landfilling of certain areas of the marshlands to construct permanent structures, with concrete reducing the soil’s ability to retain water flow. The recent construction of the Bangon River Flood Control Revetment Project and the building of dykes to manage the slumping of Binahaan River’s banks are ways to mitigate the damage of rivers changing courses due to the reported rampant deforestation upland and the increased downstream flow. Prior to Yolanda, Palo residents recall previous disasters they relate to the logging of mountains exacerbating soil erosion and the uninhibited flow of rainwaters from higher ground. Among them was the tragic flash flood in Ormoc City in November 1991 which killed over 8,000 people, and a similar experience of a flash flood in Palo in March 2011. Floods are, however, needed by the basin as a natural carrier of nutrients to replenish the fertility of soil. The marshland ecology is a natural store for water.

The town of Palo, where this ethnographic research is situated, lies directly outside of Tacloban City and serves as one of Leyte's main urban town areas. Palo is reported to be one of the most devastated areas by Yolanda due to the double force of the storm surges—waves of seawater crashing inland from the coast and gushing up the rivers—and the rapid flow of torrential rains down stream. Violent amounts of seawater, rains and fresh water combined and washed out entire villages. “*Maitum na maitum an tubig ha dagat. Mapag-ad an tubig baha.*” (The seawater was of a deep dark colour. The floodwater tasted salty.) When the floodwaters turned black in colour and tasted salty—Palo's survivors today recall that it was then they knew they were in unimaginable destruction.

Interviews with Waray Women

As much as possible, I intended for each interview to be an open process, though informed by a list of interview guide questions which I would refer to whenever there was a need to make sure we have covered most aspects. The semi-structured interviews were marked by a proper introduction asking for the woman's permission to have our time together audio-recorded. I preferred to hand out a hardcopy of the interview consent form for signing at the end of the interview, at which point we have already spent enough time together to have some comfort, familiarity and trust built for paperwork to be included in the process. In a poor community saturated by poverty reduction programmes and humanitarian aid services, and whose population are not necessarily literate in formal schooling, I understood that the signing of paperwork has garnered some degree of futile excessiveness, a redundancy that did not necessarily deliver its claim to protect or bring promised deliverables. I think of the *cedula* or the identification card required by the conquistadors on the colonized for taxation purposes, of certificates of land

ownership filed for agrarian reform programmes, the paper documents required by the local government to have Yolanda survivors' emergency shelter assistance released, or even an individual's inability to sign their names with a pen. I still question the academy's certificates of ethical review and its ability to protect Yolanda survivors from academic imperialism.

In the coming weeks while I enjoyed immersing in people's everyday life sometimes alone or often in the company of my Binisaya-speaking relatives—which included being invited to young lady's debut birthday party, visiting the mass burial sites, attending performances in the town plaza every night during fiesta week, among others—I also began to design interview questions which I intended to begin conducting in a more formalized manner. My field notes were beginning to grow full with my writing about people's everyday life as a Tagalog / English-speaking participant observer hailing from Manila / Vancouver. Through the preliminary walks and reacquainting myself with the locality, my relatives and I began to map out the *barangays* in close proximity to the main river bodies. Despite recognizing the enormous scale of the disaster caused by the storm surges, in the interest of space limits, we decided to narrow the scope to the three *barangays* of San Miguel, Salvacion and Cogon [Figure 7]. As a woman identifying to be from Manila, related to the Barrera and Lipayon families of Barangay San Miguel, and “*apo ni Ate Remi*”, I found that I was brought to and invited primarily to all-women domestic spaces where mostly lower-income women were engaged in managing small enterprises, full-time childcare and other household management duties while male partners or family members were away fishing, pedaling pedicabs, or engaged in other livelihood activities requiring greater mobility or absence from the home. Other gendered spaces included the *barangay* health centres that women often managed to administer maternal medical services, the market stalls and *sari-sari* or convenient stores also often run by women vendors and a space for many smaller gatherings.

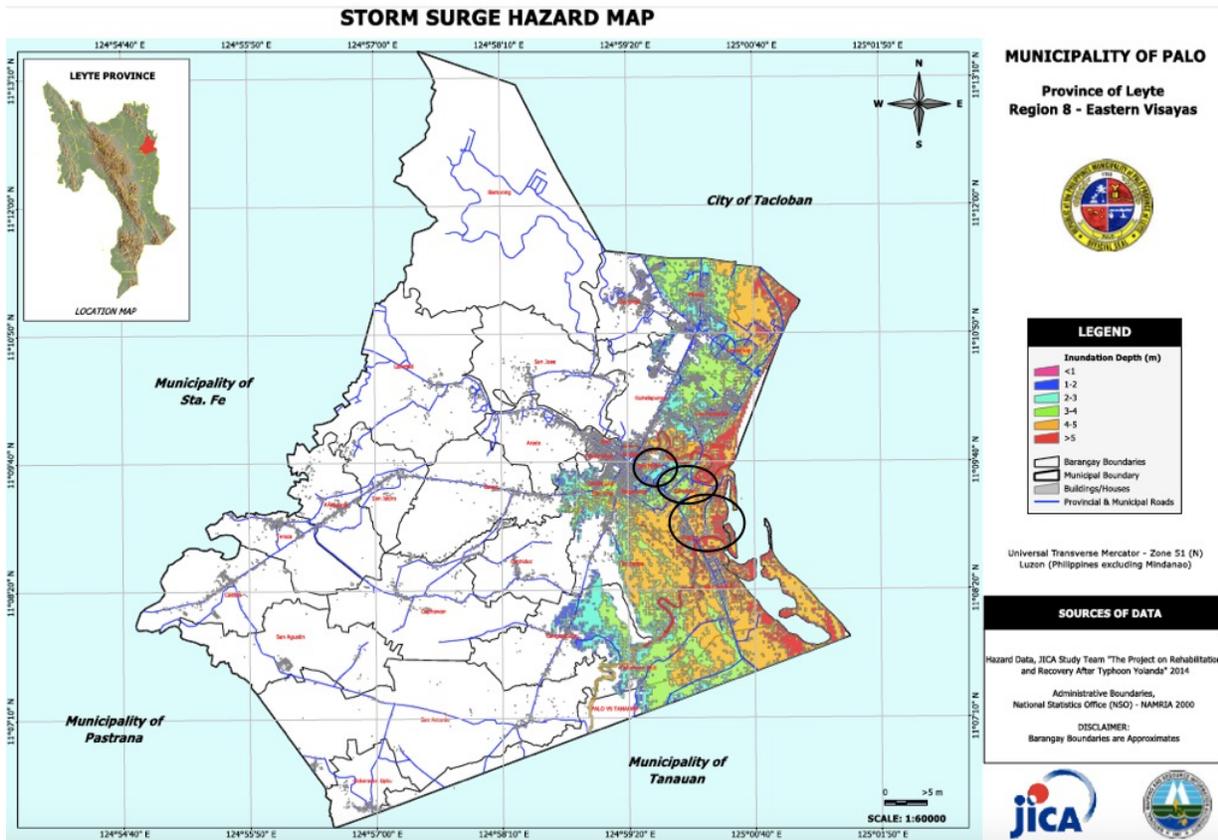


Figure 7: Storm Surge Map of Palo, Leyte Province, black circles indicating location of three barangays

Rather than predetermining individuals we wanted to approach, the process of identifying participants was a combination of having key named individuals at hand whom my relatives agreed were important to “hear from”. Examples of which included their friend who works in the local government office and assists front lines in the conduct of relief aid, plus who also sings beautifully during Sunday Mass. These also included women they had not known before but felt comfortable approaching spontaneously as they are seen to play important roles in community. A group of three elderly *barangay* health workers for instance were approached one afternoon while they worked on shift at their *barangay* health centre. As my host relatives automatically assumed the role of supporting my fieldwork, a task which they understood to be part of their hospitality whether willingly or not, they inadvertently served a role in ‘selecting’ individuals to interview: the women

had to be ‘credible’ or trusted sources, often defined as being another relative or a close friend, or if a stranger she should be having some leadership role in the community.

According to what I began writing as questions I was interested in asking, my relatives Lola Fe, Lola Filea and Ate Ching assisted in translating of the questions from Tagalog to Waray. Ate Marielle, who served as my guide around town and who sat with me in the conduct of the interviews, was of great assistance in providing spontaneous translations of what I would say in Tagalog. In designing this study, I recognize my own understanding of an Indigenous epistemology as a Filipina, which acknowledged the wisdom of Waray women’s ability to teach, learn and share their knowledge with one another. This sharing is done through the everyday practices of storytelling—*kuwentuhan*, or gathering to tell and listen to stories with one another which in this experience proved to be highly theatrical and dramatic, and *tsismisan*, or gossiping about one another’s lives which also served to spread more information across a vast web of social networks. We formulated specific interview questions based on the following research questions:

a.) How do women survivors view their gendered everyday life in relation to the rain, rivers, and the sea—before and after super typhoon Yolanda?

“When is the *habagat* season here?”

- Tagalog: “*Kailan po ang tag-ulan dito?*”
- Waray: “*San-o it panahon hit kat-uran denhi?*”

“What activities begin or end for you when the monsoon season begins? (e.g. planting rice if a farmer, fetching children from school more often when classes are suspended due to floods, etc.)”

- Tagalog: “*Ano pong mga gawain ninyo tuwing tag-ulan?*”
- Waray: “*Ano it iyo mga buruhaton nga guintitikangan o nauutod durante hit pag-abot hit*

kat-uran?”

“Where is the river and sea? What happens to them during *habagat*? What do you do when these events occur?”

- Tagalog: “*Nasaan po ang ilog at ang dagat? Ano pong nangyayari sa kanila tuwing tag-ulan? Ano pong ginagawa ninyo kung nangyayari ito?*”

- Waray: “*Hain dapit it salog ngan dagat? Ano it nahihitabo ha ira durante hit panahon hit kat-uran o habagat? Ano it imo guinbubuhat kun nanhihitabo ini?*”

“How often do storms come here? How often does it flood here?”

- Tagalog: “*Gaano po kadalas ang mga bagyo dito? Gaano po kadalas bumaha dito?*”

- Waray: “*Ano kasukot it pagbagyo denhi? Ano kasukot it pagbaha denhi?*”

“What is dangerous about the rains, the rivers, and the sea?”

- Tagalog: “*Ano po ang mapanganib / delikado / nakakasira / nakamamatay sa ulan, sa mga ilog, at dagat?*”

- Waray: “*Ano it kadelicadohan nga dara hit uuran, hit kasalogan, ngan hit dagat?*”

“Do women in your *barangay* have special or distinct needs in preparing for disasters? Do women in your *barangay* help keep the community safe or well?”

- Tagalog: “*May mga partikular po ba na pangangailangan ang mga kababaihan sa barangay ninyo para maghanda para sa mga sakuna? May mga ginagawa po ba ang kababaihan sa barangay ninyo para siguraduhing ligtas ang mga kabarangay?*”

- Waray: “*Mayda ba particular o espesyal nga panginahanglan it mga kababayan-an ha iyo barangay ha pangandaman para mga kataragman o peligro? Nabulig ba it mga kababayan-an nga mulupyoy ha pagpabilin nga talwas it iyo barangay?*”

For these questions, it is important to note the location of the interview, and ideally is in the participant's home in order to relate bodies of water and flood levels from the perspective of the house.

b.) How do women survivors make meaning of super typhoon Yolanda as expressed in their survival testimonies and disaster symbolisms?

“For you, as a Waray woman / mother / wife / grandmother / daughter / sister, what is Yolanda? How can you explain or make sense of it?”

- Tagalog: *“Para sa inyo, bilang isang babaeng Waray / ina / asawa / lola / anak / kapatid, ano ang Yolanda? Paano ninyo ito maipapaliwanag?”*
- Waray: *“Para ha imo komo usa nga babaye nga Waray-waray / nanay / asawa / lola / anak / bugto, ano an Yolanda? Paunan-o nimo ini ieesplekar?”*

“For you as a woman survivor, do you think there was/is a significant difference between the experiences of women and men surviving during and after Yolanda?”

- Tagalog: *“Bilang isang babaeng survivor, sa tingin po ba ninyo may pagkakaiba sa karanasan ng mga kababaihan at ng mga kalalakihan nung Yolanda?”*
- Waray: *“Para ha imo, komo usa nga babaye nga Yolanda survivor, mayda ba kalainan han naeksperyensyahan han kababayan-an ngan kalalakin-an durante han bagyo ngan kahuman han bagyo Yolanda?”*

For these questions, participants often alternated between explaining Yolanda on hindsight and telling their present-day testimonies of survival. The latter often took much more time, emotion and energy, and I choose to allow for participants to dwell in these stories for as long as they

needed.

I noticed most especially while I was transcribing the recorded interviews that the women would alternate between speaking in Tagalog and Waray: they spoke in Tagalog to answer a question I posed directly, and deflected to Waray whenever emotions heightened and an uninhibited rush of stories began. Although all the women comprehended both languages, they chose to speak in Tagalog *to me*, and reverted to Waray when they spoke *to one another*. They, however, took care to keep my presence always included: Ate Marielle would always lean over to me to provide impromptu translations for what I was missing, and she would also sometimes rephrase my questions for the women in moments they were less understood. The women would sometimes even forget of my very limited Waray, and would go on and on continuously with a passionate story of survival looking at me straight in the eyes. Raptured by the electrifying surge of energy in their rising voices and teary eyes, I would find myself nodding, following every word with affirmations, truly understanding perhaps despite my very limited linguistic comprehension. Despite these imperfect translations and alternations between two spoken languages, between verbal and embodied expressions, between grief and laughter, these storytelling circles were always formed by inclusiveness—invitations to witness and to become part of, and to take one another's pulse together.

Writing

“Language is also a place of struggle” (hooks, 1990, p. 146).

Although there is nothing inherently feminist in the doing of ethnographic writing, placing the work in the hands of a postcolonial feminist serves to privilege the voice of other racialized women's lives and experiences from grounded localities. As exemplified in the narrative analysis found in the following chapter, I take a close look at Waray women's voices and choice of words,

which I choose to quote extensively in the vernacular languages of Tagalog and Binisaya. Though it may be cumbersome for the non-native reader, this intentional practice I view to be inspired by feminist and *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* politics which value Waray women survivors' active theorizing from their own lived experiences. I name the women as I would address them in person, adding 'Lola' meaning grandmother, or 'Nanay' meaning mother, for elder women I sense having greater affinity to; I add 'Ma'am' as a common and more formal address to acquaintances older than me—clearly a legacy of American schooling. These names immediately position researcher and participant in relation to one another.

In her book *Yearning*, hooks writes about the way she writes: "I have been working to change the way I speak and write, to incorporate in the manner of telling a sense of place, of not just who I am in the present but where I am coming from, the multiple voices within me" (Ibid). Inspired by her eloquence and other women writers', I too consciously choose to write in a lyrical prose, with a personal and self-reflexive style, which I share with many feminist writers who view ethnographic writing in acknowledgment of the partial and positioned truths we put forward from the places and peoples we work from. This form of writing requires an attunement to a multiplicity of voices, people's memories and own forms of remembering, and also a remembering of languages which are in themselves stores of knowledges, which a writer then is required to weave together. "Storytelling is at its core decolonizing" (Simpson, 2011, p. 33), and ethnographies are after all the stories anthropologists tell. And what if the writing the anthropologist does is of a people she has relations to, by ancestral bloodline and by responsibilities to address long and ongoing histories of injustices done to the land and the waters? Australian ethnographer, Margaret Somerville writes in *Water in a Dry Land*, "I knew that I didn't want it to be about water, I wanted it to be water" (Somerville, 2013). In my writing I too want the text to hold my tears as my fingers

keyed in letters on the computer, people drenched in the rains and their bodies submerged under water, feet feeling their way on solid path to make their way to safety and higher ground. I wanted the pages somehow to hold water, understanding somehow that if I succeed, Yolanda will cease to be a single event or a resolved humanitarian crisis, but will be remembered as ancient deluges that have invaded our island-nations, that continue to lash on to our people who have long been seeking safety, security.

“Feminist ethnographers have particularly struggled over methods of representing the people they study in ways that seek the visions of the author with the visions of those they study” (Buch & Staller, 2014, p. 138). Writing this thesis as a requirement for a Western academic degree, I acknowledge that I write primarily for the English-speaking world: “Do I dare speak to the oppressed and oppressor in the same voice?” (hooks, 1990, p. 146) The multivocality of this text I hope reflects my yearning to speak back to the West, but at momentary pauses—when remembering *bayan*, a people I recall and not a nation—I loop them back into this transnational labour of straddling two worlds. How much of my own family’s stories do I write about? Recognizing that the borders delineating between ‘kin’ and ‘stranger’, between the ‘private’ and the ‘public’, dissolve in feminist and decolonizing praxis, I carefully negotiate how much to reveal in text about the relations who have co-created the work of gathering women’s stories with me. Without essentializing, how do I write of Waray women who are no strangers to death, hunger, and suffering, who survive crying and laughing, fearful and hopeful? How do I write of the stories they shared with me as survivors and victims, as grand-aunts, sisters and nieces, and so much more? How do I write of Waray women’s ferocity which they would often evoke as fearsome but which is also fearful in the face of mortality?

This research project is ultimately informed by the responsibility I recognize when I join my *kapwa* (my self in other) Filipino/as as they persist through vulnerabilities to the climate crisis and colonial present. *Pakikipag-pulso* is not only an invitation to arrive, enter, and listen to stories of survival to be written about, published and read. It is also an invitation to be among and witness, and to do something about what one learns. In the time of my summer fieldwork, sharing my travel research fund as a small contribution for house repairs was more important to my relatives than the completion of this thesis. As I write words which may not directly spell material security in their everyday lives in the Island of Leyte, I still insist in writing in multivocal ways to ensure their voices are part of this telling.

I end this chapter with a poem that honours the women beautifully, written seven days after Yolanda's first landfall by a woman academic-artist-activist. Like me the poet has chosen to arrive at the core of radiating circles where we stand with our relations: at the heart of a pulse is where we stand to be with them.

“Sumpa Ng Kawayan”
Ni Joi Barrios-Leblanc (2013)

*Matibay ang kawayan.
Iyan ng sumpa.
Hayaang ipaghampas-hampasan
ng unos,
lumangoy at magpaanod
sa baha.*

*Pigilan ang hininga
at baka malanghap
ang bangkay na naaagnas.
Tiisin ang gutom ng sikhura
na kahit sa papuri,
ay hungkag na hungkag.*

*Kalimutan natin ang kasakiman
na sa kabundukan
ay nagpapatag,
at nagbabago sa daloy
ng hangin at dagat.
Kalimutan ang pangulo
na mainit ang ulo
at sa sariling pulong
walang pakundangang lumalabas.
Kalimutan ang ayuda
na higit na bumabagal,
sa ating paghihintay.
Yumuyuko at umiindayog
sa hangin ang kawayan.
Ngunit kami ay tao, tao lamang,
Balat at dugo, luhat at buto.
Ipagpaumanhin ang galit
at pusong nagpupuyos.*

*Naghahanap kami ng katarungan
sa gitna ng dalamhati't pagluluksa,
sa aming di matapos-tapos
na dalamhati't pagluluksa.*

“The Bamboo Curse”
By Joi Barrios-Leblanc (2013)

Resilience is the curse of the bamboo.
Suffer the storm,
swim through the floods.
Bear the stench of the corpses
and the hunger
that does not go away
with praise.

Forget the greed
that levels the mountains
and changes wind and seas.
Forget the president
who walks out.
Forget the aid
that crawls slower
as we wait.

The bamboo bends and sways
with the wind.
We are human, only human.
Only flesh and tears and bone and blood.
Forgive us our anger
as we seek for justice
in our grief,
in our inconsolable grief.

V. Kababayan-an Han Karak-an (Women of Storm Surges): Meaning Making as Cultural Process of Social Repair

Chapter 5 forms the main body of this work. It provides an in-depth analysis of the stories shared by women survivors. How do Waray women survivors make meaning of super typhoon Yolanda in their survival testimonies and disaster symbolisms? How do they mobilize memories of Yolanda to engage in practices of social repair? I argue that the women survivors employ disaster memory as a cultural practise to repair their worldview, insisting on an ontology that still holds some meaning despite the wrathful destruction of a super typhoon that pounds repeatedly through the everyday violence of poverty. This section outlines how the women (a) personify the storm; (b) explain order and safety in cycles and seasons; and (c) explain syncretic theologies pertaining to ideas of justice. By naming their living world and experiences, I argue that Waray women survivors reclaim an indigenous worldview and epistemology wherein they are able to enact their ancient ferocity to survive everyday and extraordinary circumstances.

“WARAY BARO! WARAY KWARTA! WARAY BALAY! WARAY! Nawala ang lahat!” [NO CLOTHES! NO MONEY! NO HOUSE! NOTHING! Everything was taken away!] Katkat flung her arms in exasperation, her hair falling messy on her face. Her loose bun must be as tired as her body felt. We sat around on wooden benches outside a *sari-sari* store, each of us sipping on straws in glass bottles of soda. Katkat left her babies with an older neighbor who lives in the shanty just next to hers. This freed her some time to sit with us, her childhood friend Ate Marielle, and I, the visiting researcher; this was probably the only time the young woman in her late 20s could free for herself since the father of their children was always absent from home. Yolanda took everything of the little she had, she insisted. Like many mothers at the height of the storm, Katkat clung her baby to her chest, cradling him, breastfeeding, to lull him to some sleep and calm her own self down. She and other women in the evacuation centre took turns holding each other’s children; her sister-in-law too served as a wet nurse for her child when she fell tired. Yolanda’s fury shook their house down, she demonstrated with closed fists shaking wildly, “but her body is bruised by her husband’s fists too!”, shouts Ate Marielle, angered by her friend’s longstanding struggle against

domestic abuse before Yolanda, and still after it. Today Katkat still has nothing: no money in her own purse, no house that she considers hers, and no school certificate or diploma to find a job with. Her neighbours have been asking her who I was, my presence noticed given the many hours Ate Marielle and I would spend sitting with her and her children. “*DSWD*¹¹ *siya!*” [She’s a social worker!] She would brag my false identity to the neighbours, as if this afforded her some temporary security. I reminded her to visit the GABRIELA office too to seek assistance the soonest; in the meantime, I nodded to reassure her: she could tell the husband that social workers have been checking on her.

At home later in the day, after discussing women’s hardships in their *barangay*, Lola Fe my elder aunt in her 60s and a retired engineer sighs in disappointment and with some shame at the acknowledged realities of her hometown. With a melancholy she proceeds to teach me: “*Ganyan ang Waray. Wala na, pero meron pa rin. Wala na, pero meron pa rin.*” [This is who the Waray is. Nothing is left, but we still have something. Nothing is left, but we still have something.]

Prominent social scientist and scholar of disaster studies in the Philippines, Greg Bankoff, writes that the country makes a most fascinating site for examining the socio-cultural construction of hazards and people’s behaviors prior, during and after disasters. He argues that the very sites which have withstood intense proselytizing since the 1500s are also one of the most seismically and meteorologically active land masses on the planet which have experienced the highest number of disasters during the twentieth century (Bankoff, 2004). As does Oliver-Smith, Hoffman and

¹¹ The local government unit of every city or municipality has a Municipal Social Welfare and Development Officer (MSWDO) and a team of social workers whose mandate includes responding to cases of violence against women. During my fieldwork, GABRIELA officers share with me that the MSWDO of Palo has been overwhelmed with reported cases of domestic abuse, among others; GABRIELA in Palo is working to partially assist the MSWDO and her team.

other disaster anthropologists, Bankoff makes the case for correlating disasters, political structures, economic systems and social order within Filipino society, wherein the constant threat of disasters has been integrated into everyday life and into what he terms “cultures of disasters” (Bankoff, 2003). I draw on these contexts of disasters, including the work by Bautista on the eruption of Mount Pinatubo (1993; 2000), to situate Yolanda within a multitude of disasters across the island-nations. My commitment to the writing of this ethnography, however, foregrounds Waray women’s voices and their own embodied theorizing. I caution in naming the women’s own understanding of their lives, undeniably shaped by the storms, poverty and struggles against many forms of violence. I suspend adopting analyses to frame the women’s lives, and allow them to name their own ‘culture of disaster’, and if they indeed live one.

The women I spoke to in Palo agree that most of them stayed at home full-time, especially if they had children to care for. “*Nasa bahay lang nag-aantay sa asawa!*” [We are just at home waiting for our husbands!] The women laughed to tease one another, making a satirical comment on their economic dependence on male relatives—an all too common situation they recognized, but also a point for disdain among such strong-willed Waray women. While those who completed college degrees often migrated to Tacloban City or larger urban centres in neighbouring islands, the women who remained in Palo usually earned multiple incomes from hand washing laundry, fish vending, farming, or running other small enterprises. Women who lived in huts along streams and closer to the mangroves were also known for their skills in weaving of nipa palm leaves into sheets of *pawud* used for building huts and traditional roofing materials. Depending on the household’s socio-economic class based on capital income, safety from the annual floods was more ensured in houses with multiple stories, and safety from strong winds and rains was more ensured in houses built with concrete. Households who subsisted in fishing and who laboured on

farmlands and coconut plantations as landless tenants often lived in huts by the coast, directly along rivers, streams and swampier grounds.

“*San-o it panahon hit kat-uran denhi?*” [When is the monsoon season here?] All the women I asked agree it often would start in May or June all the way to the end months of each year. They explained that this was the season when rains brought floods to their *barangays*, when they would pick up children from school mid-day more often whenever classes were suspended, when they would begin hoisting house appliances and foods up to higher stories if their house were higher, or pack everything to live with another relative on higher ground. Others have long kept plastic waterproof bins where they packed clothes, their children’s things, rice and money in; others would wrap everything in plastic and tape. While men were often outdoors monitoring the rise of the rivers, watching the skies, keeping track of the number of days of continuous rains, the women often stayed home with the children and elderly and prepared their things. Sometimes a family would decide to evacuate on their own, while others wait for a directive from the *barangay* or the mayor. These gendered roles are not unusual in the rest of the Philippines, with women responsible in the daily domestic sphere, giving birth and rearing children, attending to husbands, who are multiply burdened by a need to contribute to family income in addition to the ‘care work’ they are traditionally expected to fulfill. In the context of disasters, “mothers had to secure children from Pinatubo’s *lahar* and from Ormoc City’s flash floods, and from bombs falling from the skies during military offensives in rural areas. In areas of armed conflict where men are often suspected of guerrilla sympathy, if not involvement, men staying behind to guard their houses or hiding in the forest leave evacuating women to confront military personnel inquisition and even harassment” (Delica, 1998, p. 111). Indeed, whether in contexts of armed violence or a ‘natural’ disaster, gendered relations have shaped gendered roles, vulnerabilities, and responses.

“*HUUUY! BAKWIT NA KAMO! BAKWIT NA KAMO!*” Kapitana Malvarosa, the *barangay* captain of Barangay Cogon and a boisterous grandmother in her 60s told me how difficult it always had been to tell people to evacuate in the event of an increasing storm. “*HUUUY! LET US EVACUATE! LET US EVACUATE!*”, she often helped scream with her mightiest strength on a megaphone to rile up her neighbours, as a warning especially addressed to her co-women and particularly pregnant mothers. Across Palo people agree that it has been their practice to evacuate the women first with their children and elderly to the evacuation sites, while men often stayed at home to look after the house, livestock, appliances and other assets they are worried losing. The municipality does not have enough vehicles to transport people and their livestock to designated evacuation centres, nor are there enough facilities certified as safe evacuation sites.

Nanay Lydia, another well-known elder community leader in her 50s serving as a *barangay* health worker in Barangay Salvacion, similarly tells me how she used her Waray ferocity in rousing up her neighbours to safety. She jumped up her from her chair to demonstrate, shouting: “*DALI!!! DALI NA TAYO!!! LUMALAKAS NA YUNG HANGIN!!!*” [QUICK!!! LET’S GO QUICK!!! THE WINDS ARE GETTING STRONGER!!!] Much to the laughter and entertainment of other women in the health clinic, Ma’am Lydia proceeds to give us a lecture on why it was important for locals to be bold and brave as there was no room for faintheartedness in matters of survival. Referencing to me as the meek Manileña that they perceived me to be, she contrasted herself as the fierce Waray woman who could scream and rile up her village, her *kababayen-an* or co-women to run to safety. Nanay Lydia, however, makes a crucial point that the Waray ferocity is performed: one could summon it when needed, but it is not a fact. “Many were frightened during Yolanda, and are still scared when the rains get stronger today”, gently reminded Nanay Lilia, an

older grandmother sitting next to me. She had to be tied to window grills to save her when the floods gushed into the classroom where she and 200 others sought refuge. “Not all Waray are brave”, she softly countered.

a. Personifying the Storm

“*Si Yolanda.*” By using the preposition ‘*si*’, survivors refer to the super typhoon as a person, a sentient being, one with a name. Everywhere I listened, from the local news on the radio to conversations over meals or while doing the laundry, everyone referred to the storm—“*Si Yolanda*”—like a relative, the neighbour, someone too close by and hence unforgettable. While sharing a meal one day Lola Filea, a retired public school teacher, tells us with a great mix of terror and pride recounting how she survived the storm. “*Si Yolanda parang may mga kamay! Naglalaro, pinaglalaruan kami. Ang mga chandelier sa cathedral, malalaking upuan, mabibigat na mwebles, pinaglaruan niya! Ang mga bubong inakyat niya! Tapos pag nangawit na siya, napagod, ibabagsak din niya lahat!*” [Yolanda had hands! She played, she played with us like toys! The chandelier in the cathedral, big chairs, heavy furniture, she played with them! The roofs she lifted! And when her arms strained, grew tired, she dropped everything!] Lola Filea’s hands were waving everywhere mid-air still holding on to pieces of salted fish from her plate. The storm did not only

have hands but had a mind of its own, she insisted with everyone nodding and chewing in agreement. “*May sarili siyang isip*”, as Ma’am Connie told me, a mother widowed by the disaster and a prominent community organizer for GABRIELA. The overwhelming death and destruction could not have been done by random unconsciousness, she explained. “*Mayroon bang hangin na hinahabol ka? Inisa-isa niya kami.*” [Is there such a wind that would chase you? She went after each of one us, one by one.] Nothing could bring down the coconut trees that covered their landscape except for someone with a mind, with fingered hands that knocked each spindly tree down with intent, she explained. Yolanda too had legs, told me Ma’am She, a snack vendor in a school cafeteria one afternoon when the floods subsided and their stalls dried. She exclaimed with how she and her children ran for safety. “*Hinahabol kami ng tubig pataas ng bahay!*” “The waters chased us up the house!”, she recalled in tears.



Figure 8: "Yolanda" by Neil Doloricon, Woodcut / 15.5" x 36" November 23, 2013

The Filipino language uses gender-neutral pronouns, but differentiates acting sentient beings from inanimate objects. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration or PAG-ASA uses its own unique scheme for naming tropical cyclones that enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility, choosing local nicknames in the alphabetical order to identify typhoons. In the context of the super typhoon, since it has been given a name, the gender-neutral pronoun ‘*si*’ which is used as an article for a person translates as ‘she’ in the English

language. Aided by PAG-ASA's convention of naming, Yolanda of 300 kilometres per hour wind speeds is referred to as a person by survivors. She is a relation, a sentient being with arms and legs, who howled and screamed, perhaps with a face too, as personified by Neil Doloricon on a haunting woodcut he carved a week into the aftermath [Figure 8].

"Makusog si Yolanda!" [Yolanda, she was mighty strong!] *"Ang bangis!"* [She was ferociously fearless!] *"Walang kasing lupit si Yolanda!"* [There is none as fierce as her!] By calling on *"si Yolanda"*, one could point to the storm and reference a doer, a conscious force and not a random insanity, and therefore something that could be made sense of by symbolic identification. Could women survivors perhaps understand Yolanda as one like them—Waray women historically known for their ancient ferocity and today still famed for their own temper? By identifying the storm as like them, like their world, the telling of survival testimonies becomes a cultural practice that attempts at explaining a worldview with some consistency, retelling an ontology that would still hold ground despite the destruction to its landscapes and peoples. With little perceived ability to control cosmic and invasive forces like Yolanda, perhaps women survivors lay some claim over the storm by identifying with her, and her to them.

In a somewhat comical reverse of Yolanda's wrath, survivors narrate their ecstasy when Pope Francis came to visit them. Another storm of signal number 2, named Amang, blew strong winds and rains. The crowds were all drenched wet from head to foot inside flimsy yellow raincoats. They screamed and waved when the Pope also soaked by the heavy rains drove down their town's small paved road. The women's eyes twinkled with tears as we stood huddled under the shade of a vegetable market stall, and more recounts of the Papal visit circled around. Their excitement sent goose bumps rippled all around us, me included. "NO ONE cared that Amang was growing stronger!", they reported to me wide-eyed and in mid-scream. Absolutely everyone single

person was out in the streets, the elderly, babies, the sick. “*Diyan ka lang Amang! Nandito na si Pope!*” With a palm up facing out, they commanded the storm: “Amang, you stay put where you are! The Pope is coming!” In an uncanny similarity with the Biblical reading from the Gospel of Mark 4:35-51, “*Ginpahugpoy ni Jesus an Alipuros*”, when Jesus calmed the storm with the command of his hand, women survivors recount with great glee how the intensifying storm could be commanded to calm down by a euphoric crowd of thousands in the streets now made unafraid



Figure 9: Our Lady of Hope at the Papal Mass, Tacloban City, Leyte January 15, 2015 © Willy Layug 2015



Figure 10: Women in prayer during Papal Mass at Tacloban airport, January 15, 2015

Slideshow: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2914365/Pope-Francis-takes-shelter-poncho-trip-typhoon-hit-Philippines-fresh-storms-force-abandon-visit-early.html>

by faith of larger cosmic forces that could destroy and kill but also mysteriously bless them in their favour.

Inside Palo’s Metropolitan Cathedral stands a seven-foot statue named “Our Lady of Hope” carved by Willy Layug in time for the Papal mass in Tacloban City [Figure 9 and 10]. Her skin is brown, and she is clad in a *baro’t saya*, the traditional blouse and skirt often worn by Tagalog and Bisayan women, with a black veil over her long dark hair. Many women elders enter the Palo Cathedral still veiled in lace to pray today, this conservatism reminding

me that the Visayas had been the first and oldest site of Christian crusades waged in the country. The Lady is not tattooed. Despite the lilac and pink coloured floral patterns on her skirt, the Virgin Mary's face mourns a sorrow as great as that mirrored in the faces who look up at her in prayer. Layug's sculpture offers a similar projection of women survivors' identification with symbolic figures. While Yolanda marks a violent disruption in the recorded history of storms, Our Lady of Hope—inspired by the Nuestra Señora de Salvación, the Mother of Perpetual Help, and Nuestra Señora de Dolores, mothers of a God brought to the island and all merged in a Filipinized rendition (Banal 2015)—is a powerful visual reminder of a people's long struggles with poverty created by colonial histories that seemed to have not ended.

While Yolanda screamed in hysteria [*"nagsisigaw si Yolanda"*], Lola Penyang, a short and spindly old woman in her 70s re-enacts with great gusto how she quickly bundled her grandchild dry when Yolanda, with two fists, grabbed and shook her house. We sat at the doorsill of her shanty house rebuilt on the same spot over a year after. As a good host she apologizes that she has no chair to offer me, and tells me to stand in the shade at least; while she faces the noontime heat, her wrinkled skin browned with generations of work under the sun, she wipes a rag through both sweat and tears for a life seemingly unchanged for generations. Melay too, a feisty overseas Filipina worker in her late 20s, poured her visiting friends and I more powdered juice in plastic cups as she continued with her survival testimonies. She returned pregnant from Singapore and proudly recounted how an international medical team attended to her needs during Yolanda's aftermath. "A white midwife!", she brags to the envy of her other female friends, local women who hardly avail of reproductive healthcare in their own municipal clinic; they ask me too how they could apply to work as caregivers in Canada, if I had any information to share. Melay proudly introduced her baby Claire who was seated on her lap, who Melay says clung mightily inside her uterus despite

threats of a miscarriage—“She’s brave like a true Waray!”, her mother exclaimed—as Yolanda shook them mother and child. Melay is preparing to leave soon to begin earning in dollars again, saying she refuses to sit around all day waiting for coins from older brothers. When Yolanda simply marks the continuation of the same gendered vulnerabilities and the provision of previously unavailable basic services, the super typhoon indeed becomes “*si Yolanda*”: one who is called with almost a fond familiarity, an uncommon tragedy.

Personifying natural disasters is not unique to the context of Yolanda. Social researchers have written of how survivors from across cultural contexts anthropomorphize the catastrophic forces that have ravaged through their communities and ecologies. Survivors in the island of Jamaica for instance, have also personified Hurricane Gilbert when it struck in 1988. Given the Jamaicans’ ambivalent attitudes towards what they call ‘being bad’, and the domination of male aggression in society, survivors quickly attributed the hurricane with the reputation of a ‘rampaging wildman’ (Barker & Miller, 1990, pp. 112-113). Survivors called the hurricane ‘Wild Gilbert’, he who ‘raged and howled’ and was “badder dan all of dem [other typhoons]” (Ibid, p.114). In a similar vein, Central-Javanese peoples attribute anthropomorphic causes to their frequent experiences of disasters. The powerful earthquake of 2006 which killed 6,000 in Yogyakarta was accompanied with threats of Mount Merupi’s eruption, and subsequently followed by a tsunami only two months after. Many residents of Java identify Ratu Kidul, the Goddess of the Ocean, to be responsible for these tragedies—“a goddess of elusive presence”, one who cannot be seen but who controls the sea and the land, a savior and a destroyer, and whose discontent with people’s behavior is manifested in disasters (Friend, 2006).

Bankoff argues that “the device of investing hazard with personality, of anthropomorphizing the event, can be seen as an important means of maintaining cultural

resilience in a society that experiences frequent disasters caused by natural hazards” (2004, pp. 94-95). Hoffman similarly argues that the use of metaphors is a “reflect the mental processes of a collective people and the fruits of both creative impulse and sense-making reasoning” (2002, p. 113). Whether personifying disasters is argued to be ‘cultural resilience’, a ‘psychological prop’ for social repair (Barker & Miller, 1990), or an extended metaphor of a cosmological view (Friend, 2006), I argue that personifying Yolanda also means more. By naming a living world, Waray women survivors are ultimately reclaiming meaning in the context of Yolanda. Naming a super typhoon as a sentient being is an agentic act of revitalizing an indigenous worldview and epistemology which reveal a relational understanding of powerful waters and winds. They reveal a storm that is a sentient and agentic force—one perhaps similar to them in ferocity but which destroys them too, a storm that occurred in a day but also repeatedly happens on their own bodies and communities—and evokes a cultural trauma understood by Waray women’s collective experiences of poverty, dispossession and gendered violence.

b. Safety and Order in Seasons and Cycles

Kapitana Malvarosa, the local village head in Barangay Cogon, explained that the difficulty in getting people to act on a forecoming disaster lies in their inability to perceive danger. The forces of winds and waters are understood as all too familiar in their seasonal visits. “*Sanay na kami sa baha!*” [We are very used to the floods!] This is what everyone in Palo told me. To attest to this, the municipality has its very own Schistosomiasis Hospital, an unmistakably large yellow building that specifically attends to local residents who are all known to have some degree of the ‘snail fever’, an infection of the urinary tract and intestines caused by parasites in floodwaters. Despite the lamentable lack in many other basic infrastructures to address reproductive health, services to respond to the all too uncommon cases of domestic abuse, or daycare centers, the

monumental yellow hospital testified to the perennial experience of floods. “*Na-schisto adto tanan!*” [Everyone got schisto!] Such is the chronic crisis in Palo. It is also no surprise for a town built in an ecological watershed. Due to the regularity of floods fishing households are also known to row their wooden boats out on their streets to help ferry people wading in the waters, or to assist in search and rescue operations if needed. Palo residents understand that if it has been raining non-stop for at least three to five consecutive days, men will begin to monitor the rise of the rivers; the *barangay tanod* or security officers, usually men who volunteer to assist the *barangay* captain in front line response to community concerns, would have their radios and cellular phones in hand to coordinate with neighbours. Women are often responsible for preparing the children and supplies, and they get ready for instructions to stay or leave.

Even the unprecedented scale of the strongest storm in recorded history is associated by Yolanda survivors with another ‘Yolanda’ which happened a century ago. With the reference to cycles, *siglos* or ages, I learned from elders’ testimonies: “*Bawat 100 taon, may delubyo.*” This great deluge was prophesized and due to arrive, they insist, and another will return a century later according to their oral traditions. The women said that the *delubyo* of a hundred years ago was especially mighty with coconut fruits flying like bowling balls across the skies, wrecking people’s homes and the *poblacion* or the town plaza where the powers of State and Church have stayed seated for centuries. Sitting on wooden benches outside a *sari-sari* or convenience store, two grandmothers and three young mothers cradling their toddlers began to theorize the place name of Tacloban City, Yolanda’s ‘ground zero’. “*Amo it gingaranan an Tacloban hin Tacloban kay natakloban an Tacloban! Na natabunan daw!*” [And this is why we call the place Tacloban because Tacloban had been covered! They say it was completely buried!] “*Nataklob! Natabunan! Nawaray!*” [Covered! Buried! Disappeared!] The women’s collective memory indeed matches

historical records of a strong typhoon in the year 1987, dating 116 years prior to Yolanda, which brought storm surges upon Tacloban. This was reported in Spanish as “El Baguio de Samar y Leyte” (The Typhoon of Samar and Leyte) by a Jesuit priest (Borrinaga R. , 2015, p. 240). Learning from these women’s stories, I argue that the “eternal cycle cosmologies” which Hoffman writes about in her ethnographic work (2002: 130) do not simply allude to cyclical metaphors constructed by survivors to make sense of a violent disruption, but instead signal to a real ontology explained by the women’s stories.

Cycles are not only expressed in seasons of time, but in the ways ethical relations move in spirals. In *The Golden Wave*, Gamburd writes an ethnography of the island of Naeaegama in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami (2014). Chapter 2 offers a compelling discussion of survivors incorporating both moral and geophysical explanations for tsunami deaths which they explain through ‘karmic justice’, referencing the ecological impact of the fisheries industry and the mining coral of reefs as part of their karma. Similarly, the Central-Javanese explain their suffering during the eruption of Mount Merapi, the earthquake and tsunami all in 2006, also as a consequence of their own violations against a code of conduct with the natural world. Heated public debates among Jakarta’s residents in the immediate aftermath pointed out their negligence to perform certain rituals to Ratu Kidul, the Goddess of Ocean who governs both lands and seas, or the controversial construction of a shopping centre on the sultan’s ancestral grounds (Friend, 2006, p. 15). In a similar vein Waray women survivors are self-reflexive in their narratives of their own ethical transgressions relating to the environment as fishers and those living near the rivers and subsisting directly from the natural environment. Apart from the debris of broken houses and property, women recall the mounds of garbage that lay wasted over their entire neighbourhoods. All the plastic bags, diapers, and wrappers they threw out to sea, came back in mounds of thick black mud

in a rancid stench of decay—they explained that these were all brought from deep under the sea, hurled up by the waves, and dumped inland with the storm surges. “*Kapag tinapon mo ang basura sa ilog, sa dagat, ibabalik sayo!*” “If you throw garbage out into the river, the sea, it will be returned to you!” many concluded. Similar to the concept of karma, the women also teach me the concept of ‘*bulos*’ which describes the gush of waters but also a karmic ferocity that attacks in vengeance. A greater need to manage proper waste disposal now is often spoken about, and a resistance to throwing garbage out to sea.

Explaining disasters as a form of ecological retribution is not unique to Palo in the context of Yolanda. Articulations of how human actions on the larger environment ultimately return to act upon communities in cyclical patterns are found across indigenous paradigms. An elder fisherman living in Mindoro Oriental, Philippines who lost 9 of his grandchildren to the tsunamis in 1994 told reporters: “The sea that had given life to us has taken it all back” (Bankoff, 2004, p. 95). The tragic flash flood which killed at least 5,000 in Ormoc City, Leyte on the eve of November 5th 1991 was also largely blamed by the survivors on illegal loggers. According to an old man selling cigarettes interviewed in the midst of the devastation, the town must be rebuilt according to ‘Nature’s terms’ (Ibid).

Ma’am Altea, a bright high-spirited leader in her mid-30s, heads Barangay Cogon’s Women Friendly Space which was organized with the assistance of international development organizations and government agencies. She proudly shared with me about their current initiatives in community organizing, which includes involving women in hazard mapping activities, trainings in disaster preparedness, discussions of their livelihood concerns, among others. She lost 13 in her family. Upon recalling the green that she said she began to see sprouting on the brown barren hills weeks after the wreckage of the storm, she cried, moved by a sense that God still causes all to

regrow once more: “*Hiya mangud creation ha na tanan, amo pagsiring ko nga... Hiya gui ti may pagkuan ha tanan gihapon.*” Many share Ma’am Altea’s sentiments in finding reassurance in the continuation of life after death. In these cyclical ideologies, a certain justice is served, a certain order restored.

What is unfamiliar for Palo residents, however, is the noticed delays in the monsoon season in the recent years which have affected their farming and fishing calendars most directly. The El Niño heat was harsh during my fieldwork conducted from June to August 2015—a bizarre disruption in months of supposedly heavier rains, which people associated with nostalgia with their fiesta parades. Despite the high drowning risk for people in a watershed, the regularity and frequency of their rivers and streams overflowing for generations, make floods hazards and not a disaster in people’s minds. Similarly, at least six storms enter through the Pacific Ocean every year and make their way through the Eastern Visayas. These known patterns are trusted and not feared. Forces of winds and waters are known by many in many ways: the 𐄇𐄇𐄇 *buhawî* or cloudburst is described like a tornado or a torrential downpour which the elders attribute the tragic Ormoc flashflood in 1991 and the recent flashflood of Tacloban in March 2011 (Borrinaga R. , 2015, pp. 239-240). Since Yolanda’s tragedy, many survivors were angered at the government’s inability to translate the term “storm surge” claiming that if only they understood what it meant, more would have run to safety. Kapitana Malvarosa of Cogon, where many of their men stayed at home and died, exclaims her frustration: “*KUNG GINYANO la lugod pagsering nga TIDAL WAVE lugod, kay mahadlok an mga tawu!*” [IF ONLY they told us it was a TIDAL WAVE many people will be scared!] I have also heard young mothers ask school teachers after class what a storm surge is in Binisaya. Shrugs and uncertain looks. Mothers flip through their children’s textbooks wondering out loud. Is it 𐄇𐄇𐄇 *tsu-balod*, 𐄇𐄇𐄇 *tsu-alon*, 𐄇𐄇𐄇 *silakbô*, 𐄇𐄇𐄇 *daluyong*, or

ᜆᜄᜋᜏᜃ *humbak*? Is it even the place name ᜆᜄᜋᜏᜃᜆᜋᜏᜃ Tacloban? (Ibid p. 251) Scholars offer the ancient word ᜆᜄᜋᜏᜃᜆᜋᜏᜃ *karak-an* (Borrinaga R. , 2014), coincidentally rhyming with the word *karat-an* in Waray for evil or great harm. Ancient Waray knowledge of storms exists. These forces of winds and waters have long shaped and have been known by the Eastern Visayan islands. Storms are therefore only commonly understood as hazards—as potential sources of danger, not necessarily a cause for loss and damage. Storms become disasters when people do not name, understand or know what is coming—when they are forgotten from temporal and relational cycles.

c. Syncretic Theologies of Justice

I was invited to squat on the concrete floor by two single mothers, their toddlers surrounding us and a breastfeeding baby. A small electric fan rotated to cool us in the afternoon heat as we chatted on a woven mat where they would all sleep on at night. Everyone in the tiny quarters except myself survived Yolanda, the little one nursing included. In the midst of their survival stories, I asked the young women, “*Para ha imo, ano an Yolanda?*” [What is Yolanda for you?] They answered convinced that Yolanda is one of the ‘signs of the times’, a ‘*pagmata*’, a God-given warning to open our eyes. “*Pinapamulat tayo*”, we are being woken up to change our ways in these ‘times of great sin’. Each one proceeded to tell me of personal encounters they had before the storm with mysterious old women in ragged clothes, unusual in their *barangay* where everyone is expected to know all their neighbours. Similar to many Filipino folk tales, the old beggar once given some kindness returns the generosity with a warning: “*Mag-ingat kayo, magbibigay ang Diyos ng pagmata.*” [Take great care, God will be giving a wake up call, a great tragedy.] I recall a similar recount that Lola Fe and Lola Nilda told me once as we watched a blazing red sun set from their rooftop. They taught me of ‘*balaraw*’, or how the sighting of a red full moon is to be read as another ominous sign that brings disasters, as their elders taught them.

Ma'am Daday too, a public school teacher who is soon nearing retirement, agreed that she also knew about *balaraw*. She sat me down after her afternoon class, fanning in the El Niño heat. She said that she and her other women friends who attend the weekly rosary vigils call these signs “*marao na signales*”. Unfortunately, she said, not many young people are familiar anymore with these warnings of a forthcoming tragedy.

Palo, as is much of the Eastern Visayas, was one of the first sites of Christianizing missions by waves of colonizers. All across the archipelago, the region seems to bear one of the most thoroughly Christianized island-nations especially told by its landscapes filled with churches, pilgrimage routes, and places named after Catholic saints. The Metropolitan Cathedral of Our Lord's Transfiguration in Palo is in fact the site of the first Eucharistic mass held in the Philippines in 1521. Despite what appears to be a near absolute erasure of indigenous worldviews, I argue that syncretic beliefs continue to pervade the landscape and people's beliefs. As I heard in many of the Waray women's survival narratives, they attributed disasters to higher powers: to Ginoo, Senyor, or Diyos—a male God that is named by the evangelizing conquistadors in Spanish. These names are, however, not absolutely Christian either. The indigenous word Ginoo for example applies to both male and female, exemplified in the translation of the prayer hailing the Virgin Mary as “Aba Ginoong Maria”.

Nanay Celeste takes medications for her heart and is part deaf. She has a hard time hearing my questions in Tagalog, although looking straight at me with squinted eyes, she was intent to tell me more of how she and her family survived. After her daughter shouted to repeat my question, Nanay Celeste's jumped up from her seat and dramatized how she clutched everyone around her tight as they squeezed into a tiny cemented bathroom while Yolanda screamed high outside their wooden shanty. “Yolanda pushed that little wooden door off the frame! But we pushed, we pushed,

we puuushed our bodies as hard as we could against the door!”), said Nanay Celeste’s youngest and skinny daughter. “HAAAIIL MAAARYYY!!! HAAAIIL MAAARYYY!!!” Nanay Celeste screamed for us, as loud as she prayed with her family that day. Amidst our uncontrollable laughter watching her theatrical performance, I remembered many similar stories told to me of survivors who clasped their rosaries tight, huddled with their families reciting a litany of Our Father’s and Hail Mary’s as Yolanda raged on. Everyone somehow held mightily to a fundamental belief that the storm could be pleaded to and prayed for to calm down. Bankoff writes that these similar accounts from the Ormoc flash flood or the Mount Pinatubo eruption among many more across the Philippines, “hint at an entirely different way of perceiving reality whereby the workings of the natural world are regarded as the result not only of physical forces, but also on unseen ones”, an animist cosmology that has incorporated the Christian God into itself (2004, p. 100). This is a clear manifestation of the indigenous paradigm in the Visayas, wherein natural forces like celestial bodies or flowing waters were personified for worship, where the winds themselves were addressed prayers for fair weather, and that supernatural signs were unwise to ignore by the Visayans who considered themselves vastly outnumbered by the unseen (Scott, 1994, pp. 77-85). Yolanda was not merely a velocity assigned wind speeds in kilometres per hour, described with climate science, nor tracked with meteorological equipment. Instead, ‘*Si Yolanda*’ could be calmed down with prayers, was both an unprecedented rampage but also a familiar ferocity that would make the same pathway every 100 years, and a force of moral retribution.

Attributing natural disasters to cosmic powers is often interpreted if not scorned at entirely by Western modernist standards of progress as a mark of illiteracy and ignorant resignation. I argue that it is rather their embodied acknowledgment that human beings are truly small, only a tiny part of much larger cosmic and powerful forces that we are dependent on, rather than overlords of

creation. Hoffman argues that disasters serve to combat the false divisions placed to separate ‘culture’ and ‘nature’, exemplifying that all human endeavour indeed takes place on a physical plane where “the environment roars up implacably to demonstrate that the divisions by which the people regimented reality are illusion” (2002, 115), subsuming culture, society and environment altogether. Waray women survivors understand their small yet not insignificant place in the cosmos, at the mercy of catastrophic forces of wind and water such as a storm, and yet inextricably interconnected with the natural environment in our actions and responses.

The Waray often speak the common expressions “*waray*” to say “nothing” or “there is none left”, and “*ambot*” to say “I don’t know” correspondingly. Virgilio Enriquez, the founder of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, argues for a re-interpretation of such common Filipino expressions which have often been taught as negations or negatives by colonial education. For instance, the common phrase in Filipino, “*bahala na*”, is often referred to as a fatalistic sigh of resignation when one encounters insurmountable difficulties. This phrase instead originally derives from “*Bathala na*”, a total surrender to the Creator, Bathala, who one believes in will take care of everything. Borrinaga too offers a complimentary explanation to what colonial education has taught our collective memory as an expression of dismal fatalism. He offers that *bahala* in Binisaya means the number 100,000,000, with ‘*bahala na*’ translating as “I take one in a hundred million chance”, a reckless optimism that is at once unbelievable and admirable (1992). Cynthia Bautista writes of a similar observation in the context of the Mount Pinatubo eruption of 1992 in the Philippines, wherein residents of Concepcion in Tarlac Province engaged in ‘*bahala na*’ as a kind of calculated risk-taking that is not lacking in faith in prayer and divine intercession (Bautista C. , 2000). In this argument, perhaps “*waray*” and “*ambot*” should also be reinterpreted not as ignorance but a humble acknowledgment of one’s inability to know everything, as in theological mysteries.

Survivors often question their own moralising explanations when they ask why ‘good’ people died, why ‘bad’ people received so much relief aid, why ‘innocent’ people suffer, why the ‘lazy’ now have new television sets and new roofs when the ‘hardworking’ still have so little. When Pope Francis conducted a Papal visit to Leyte in January 17, 2015, he was confronted with these very mysteries that survivors have been asking. “Why do children suffer?”, a young girl survivor asked him, crying. Recorded in this powerful moment, the Pope bowed his head, only offered silence and wept with a crowd of thousands in recognition for the unspeakability of inexplicable insanity. “*Para sa imo, anot Yolanda? Kay ano umabot ha aton an Yolanda?*” “For you, what is Yolanda? What brought us Yolanda?”, I asked many women survivors. “*Di ako maaram*” [I am not educated], others would reply. Despite an ignorance measured in level of formal education—criterion firmly established by Spanish and American literacies—the silent pauses in between statements, the shaking of one’s head speechless, sighing, “*ay... ambot*” [ay... I do not know], women survivors articulate an overwhelming and simultaneously humbling recognition for what they do not understand. Yet, their claim to ignorance is a simultaneous claim to knowing something. “*Di ako maaram*”. After a humble confession of “the little they know” follows extensive labouring to expound on grounded theologies as probable explanations for their incomprehensible suffering.

“*Gusto ba ng Diyos na mamatay ang mga bata? Hindi, hindi ginusto ng Diyos yan.*” [Did God want for the children to die? No, God did not want that.] “*Sumusobra na ang mga tao.*” [People have gone overboard with their wrongdoings.] “*Nakakalimot na ang mga tao sa Diyos.*” [People are already forgetting about God.] “*Kailangan na magbawas kasi marami ng makasalanan.*” [There was a need to lessen our numbers because many have grown sinful.] Nanay Nila, a grandmother and whose daughter is a single mother, was eager to tell me of the horrific

ordeal she and her family went through to survive. I remember her strong arms, large hands combing her unruly hair as she just got home from vending all day, her grin huge with missing teeth. Since she was a child she has been paddling in wooden boats whenever the river and its creeks overflowed to flood her village during the annual monsoon season. In the middle of dramatic re-enactments and heavy sighs, she lamented the 79 children and women who died as evacuees in the school next to her house. “*Pinalitan ng Diyos ang mga tao kasi sobra na ang sala.*” [God replaced the people because our sins have been too great.] ‘*Paghuhugas*’ or the concept of washing, cleansing or purifying is strikingly evoked by the women to describe the otherwise violent force of water in the form of storm surges wiping out entire communities. I thought of these women’s strong grip scrubbing clothes in big coloured basins around the public pump wells, and how manual laundering for a living was by no means a light task. Perhaps this is what washing their villages meant too, a great labour by cosmic and natural forces to destroy and transform their struggles.

Conclusion

“*WARAY BARO! WARAY KWARTA! WARAY BALAY! WARAY! Nawala ang lahat!*” [NO CLOTHES! NO MONEY! NO HOUSE! NOTHING! Everything was taken away!] Many of the women I had spoken to speak of having nothing left after Yolanda. The violent storm surges destroyed everything and had taken all they had away. Just as poverty does. Waray women, like the watershed and coasts they live in, have taken the brunt of storms, floods, and waves of colonial violence. “*Nataklob! Natabunan! Nawaray!*” [Covered! Buried! Disappeared!] Yet, despite these apocalyptic forces that have ravaged their ecologies and communities, something remains.

“Ganyan ang Waray. Wala na, pero meron pa rin. Wala na, pero meron pa rin.” [This is who the Waray is. Nothing is left, but we still have something. Nothing is left, but we still have something.]

Out of the 12 women survivors who I formally conducted interviews with, and the many others I listened to and who invited me into their homes and *kuwentuhan* or story circles, less than a handful were official members of GABRIELA and no one identified being engaged in some form of political activism. Palo as a site of many violent encounters—the Spanish, the American, dead Japanese bodies from the Second World War still in the marshes, storms, floods, and the 100-year *delubyo*—what would a Waray theory to guide recovery and survival look like? As reflected in the women’s survival narratives, the Waray’s ancient ferocity is a desired quality and a principle of action for them in the ways it is enacted in the everyday but also in extraordinary circumstances. The Waray ferocity, rather than inner resiliency as defined by Western conception, is instead associated with action. It is much like survivance as conceptualized by Anishinaabe cultural theorist, Gerald Vizenor, who defines survivance as an active sense of presence by contemporary Native Americans, in contrast to the notion of passive victimhood. The Waray ferocity is survivance. It is never backing away from a fight, it is brinkmanship, it is a temper that screams prayers, and holds a broken door up against torrential winds. It is a baby girl clinging hard to her mother’s uterus, refusing a miscarriage as fiercely as her mother labours for a better life. It is mothers running fast with strong legs and strong arms carrying children even not their own. It is women taking turn to lull children to sleep, performing courage while their own fears pound through their chests. Like a living storm that howls, wails, and moves with swift arms, the human self is an agent and who is able to do something in response to extraordinary forces such as Yolanda. For women of storm surges, ferocity is a quality for action.

VI. Conclusion

The final chapter concludes the thesis by offering a Waray theory of recovery and survivance based on the women's survival testimonies and a Waray Origin Story. The chapter ends with offering recommendations for promoting women's organizing and leadership in disaster preparedness, community development and social justice efforts in the island-nations of the Eastern Visayas.

A Waray Theory of Recovery and Survivance¹²

Gongs were played together in large ensembles by the sea or carried on boats when the Waray readied for warfare. An ancient ferocity was born in these island-nations cradled by the notorious seas of the Pacific. Fishers were warriors here, where storms brew and rough waves lash inland. One does not hear these gongs anymore, nor are these beautiful and heavy brass instruments to be seen anywhere in the poorest province of the country. Ravaged by centuries of colonizing missions that have erased tattoos from men and women's victories, by military invasions that have silenced the lyrical verses sung and chanted to one another with canons and gunfire, the Eastern Visayas has been wrecked by unceasing storm surges. Rule dictated by Manila and the histories written into the archive by the Tagalog have erased the letters, poetry, and messages written in Waray with the sharp curves of the *baybayin* script. Soldiers and guerrillas open fire at each other for decades in communities hardly reached by healthcare workers or public school teachers. In these far away boundaries, peripheries of an archipelagic nation-state, lie island-nations that take the brunt of intensifying storms where the State cannot protect nor save them. The State refuses to hear Waray battle cries calling to be free from feudal enslavement, calling for land reform, calling for the right to be let to live: *"DI MAPAPALIT AN AMON KABUHI!"* [OUR SURVIVAL IS NON-NEGOTIABLE!]

¹² As a Tagalog-speaking Manileña, I recognize the limits of the knowledge I present here. Beyond the scope of this thesis, I extend my intention to collaborate with and learn from Waray scholars from the Visayan region to expound on this.

Among the many origin stories told in the islands of Leyte and Samar, one of them tells of how the first peoples, 𐄆𐄇 Laki and 𐄆𐄈 Baye, were borne from coconuts which have always grown in abundance across the Eastern Visayas:

“After the world was made and the coconut palms had borne fruit, two coconuts well ripened, happened to fall into the sea on whose shore their palm tree was growing, whose waters received them and carried them on its waves for many days wherever the wind and current wanted, until one day when the sea was raging, it threw them with violence against some rocks. Ready to hatch—as if they were eggs—they broke open with the blow and—as if preordained—there came forth from the larger a man, whom they call Laki, and from the smaller a woman, whom they call Baye. And from these two as the first parents of the human race, all people are descended” (Alcina, 1668 p. 178).

Although I did not hear this story in person from Waray women survivors, and had unfortunately only read the text as chronicled by the Spanish priest Francisco Alcina in the 17th century, I imagine that the story shines light on what could be offered as a Waray theory of recovery and survivance. Alcina’s translation inevitably bears a sexist and Christian bias to the Origin Story, which I argue may misinterpret *laki* (which means “big” in size but also “male” as in *lalaki*) as the male superiority and primacy afforded to Adam in the Biblical Genesis; nevertheless, the text still reads with a wave-like cadence, as if written to record a live recitation. I imagine that like the rocking of seas that are gentle and ferocious, this is how such lyrical epics were chanted in Waray centuries ago (Scott, 1994, pp. 96-98). In writing this final chapter as a transnational Filipina living on unceded and traditional Coast Salish Territories, I am inspired by the works of Indigenous feminist scholars from Turtle Island such Potawatomi scholar, Robin Wall Kimmerer, who begins her work with the Skywoman creation story to theorize on Indigenous ecological science (Kimmerer, 2013). Similarly, Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Simpson writes of “stories from within” to theorize on Indigenous resurgence: “Our ways of being promoted the good life or continuous rebirth at every turn: in the face of political unrest, ‘natural disasters’ and even disasters” (Simpson, 2011, p. 20).

In the context of super typhoon Yolanda, of centuries of historical and ongoing colonialisms, and intensifying storms from the Pacific Ocean, what would a Waray theory of recovery and survivance be like? How could this strengthen strategies and the plan for resurgence?

As told in this Creation Story, violent forces are not foreign to the Eastern Visayan island-nations. The Waray have never taken these forces passively nor with an indifference that weakens. As warriors, they have known an ancient ferocity borne from raging skies and seas. “*MATAPANG yung Waray! Kaya yung Tagalog takot sa Waray eh! PAG AKO YUNG INAWAY, TALAGANG LALABAN AKO! HINDI AKO UURONG!*” [The Waray is FEARLESS! That is why the Tagalog is scared of the Waray! IF SOMEONE QUARRELED WITH ME, I WOULD REALLY FIGHT! I WILL NOT BACK DOWN!] Nanay Lydia, still serving her *barangay* as a volunteer health worker in her senior years, exclaimed this with a loud enthusiasm. Indeed the Waray is characterized by an attitude of ‘brinkmanship’, of pursuing something to its farthest limits (Borrinaga R. , 2015). This ferocity is, however, not to be essentialized as a reckless or destructive temperament; instead it is also an expression of resilience which one may choose to act or live by. “*Ganyan ang Waray. Wala na, pero meron pa rin. Wala na, pero meron pa rin.*” [This is who the Waray is. Nothing is left, but we still have something. Nothing is left, but we still have something.]

The Waray’s agentic self is not the separate Western liberal self who pursues anything he or she individually wills for. Instead, just as the coconuts are received by the rocking sea, carried by its waves for many days wherever the wind and current wanted, the Waray too allows to be in relation to such forces—not out of fatalism, but with an acknowledgment for the larger cosmic paradigm they are but only a little part of. Like the raging sea that threw the coconuts with great force against rocks, Yolanda brought three mighty storm surges inland to crash on entire communities and ecologies. Those who lived did not just survive, but continuously strive to act in

defiance of persistent forces of marginalization, oppression and death. As Anishinaabe scholar, Gerald Vizenor, writes: “While ‘survival’ conjures images of a stark minimalist clinging at the edge of existence, survivance goes beyond mere survival to acknowledge the dynamic and creative nature of Indigenous rhetoric” (p.20) Indeed, when the Waray pursue what is beyond the extremes of their limits, they are actively outliving the confines set upon the colonized and marginalized. When the women survivors dramatized how they clung hard to window grills or screamed prayers and riled one another to safety, when they named Yolanda as someone they recognized, when they laughed their fears hysterically into tears hearing one another’s testimonies of survival, they all engage in acts of social repair. These are stories of an ancient ferocity they tell one another everyday.

Recommendations for Praxis: Waray women and disasters

As Indigenous feminisms have underscored, women’s empowerment is not always defined as gender ‘equality’, ‘sameness’, or as what white feminism asserts to be the “right for women to be men” (St. Denis, 2007). Instead, I argue that in the Indigenous Waray paradigm, the binaries have been profoundly complementary and fluid. 𐄂𐄃 Laki and 𐄄𐄅 Baye were carried by the waves together, were born into life together, and may be embodied with a fluidity that transcends fixed gender binaries. The Waray Origin Story parallels many other variations told across the Visayas, such as the marriage between the sea breeze and the land breeze, or how the first two human beings emerged from a piece of bamboo split open by a hawk, or of the pair of floating coconuts also pecked open by a bird (Scott, 1994, pp. 87-88). One cannot dominate the other, nor could one exist without the other.

In recognizing how men have come to dominate positions of governance in existing political structures all across the Philippines, one must caution and remember that patriarchy is

and had not been universal. The sexist erasure of women from positions of leadership, the neglect of their roles in community and participatory development processes, the gendered violence acted on their bodies, and their heightened vulnerabilities during disasters, are by no means natural. These are all a colonial legacy of conquistadors, military invasions, and State neglect. Assessment reports issued by international and local NGOs one year after Yolanda underscore that local-level implementation of the Disaster Risk Reduction and Management (DRRM) Law remains weak, and continues to overlook the role of civil society organizations and community members themselves, particularly women in both disaster preparedness and broader development efforts in the country (Oxfam International, 2014, pp. 19-21). There is also a persisting lack in prioritizing the realities and needs of the most vulnerable sectors including “the elderly, women and children, persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples, informal settler families, internally displaced peoples in conflict or insurgency areas, and communities that are in small islands or geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas” (Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO), 2014, p. 2).

In a manual issued by the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) after Yolanda, entitled “*Handa Na Ba Ang Pamayanan Mo?*” (Is Your Community Ready?), the national agency provides a disaster preparedness checklist for local government units (LGUs) to follow. Action points relating to planning, organizing, capacity building, systematizing communications and others are neatly categorized under the phases of “Before Disaster”, “During Disaster” and “After Disaster”. This 10-page booklet enumerates what the DRRM Act mandates all LGUs to be equipped with: comprehensive land use plans, hazard maps, local DRRM plans, training certificates, installation of warning systems—all issued by a top-down directive on what are required from LGUs predominantly led by men, with little formal participation from women or due recognition for their existing roles in local variations of DRRM systems in place. In the

absence of establishing clear connections between disaster preparedness and the chronic crises of poverty and development challenges, these dropdown checklists with insufficient capital resources for implementation do little for disaster preparedness.

At the time of my fieldwork, the position of the Municipal Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Officer in Palo had just been filled by a young man who was hired with haste, after the desk was cross-posted to different municipal officers already overburdened with multi-tasking. The Barangay Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Committees (BDRRMCs) mandated by the law have yet to be formally organized across Palo. Barangay captains often reasoned to me that their *barangay tanods*—ad hoc all-male teams in charge of keeping order and security—already serve the purpose of BDRRMCs, and that overseeing everyday concerns in their *barangay* already kept their hands full with little spare time to mind additional technical requirements relating to DRRM. There was only one ambulance to serve the entire municipality. A van or two from the municipal hall to assist in the evacuation needs of 33 *barangays*. There are still no additional evacuation centres built to withstand stronger wind speeds. Before and after Yolanda, women pointed out to the very same sites they would bring their families to for refuge: the Cathedral, the Seminary, the Convent, school classrooms, or relatives' homes in other *barangays* on higher ground. The men still watch the skies, the rising rivers and flood waters, corresponding over their radios and cellphones when the rains begin. The women still stay at home, tasked with packing everything into boxes, carrying material possessions up to higher stories, watching over the children, ready to leave their houses should their household decide to evacuate. Such is the 'system' in place. I see little use for the DILG's checklist whose technical acronyms are a comical

mouthful for many male *barangay* officials, and for women who insist that despite Yolanda they already know what to do in light of coming storms.



Figure 11: Women Friendly Space, Barangay Salvacion, Palo, Leyte

While conducting interviews with women survivors, I noticed several newly constructed houses called ‘Women Friendly Spaces’ [Figure 11]. These were set up in coordination among Plan International, UNFPA, DSWD and the

municipal government, and serve as progressive spaces for Waray women to organize and participate actively in the development of their local communities. As a recommendation for promoting a Waray theory of recovery and survivance among women survivors, I offer the following suggestions to be undertaken in such spaces:

- Mapping: During the time of my fieldwork, extensive DRRM-related workshops were in progress with the assistance of Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Caritas. These facilitated gatherings were creating large hand-drawn hazard maps for each *barangay*. I propose that in addition to surveying the physical terrain, it will be useful to also map out ecological relations and indigenous knowledges on to the landscape. As women are often not in formal positions of local governance, it is important for women to identify and assert what they view to be ecological damages in their surrounding environment e.g. deforestation upland or eroding sections of the riverbank. In addition, women elders in

particular should be invited to remember and re-name these disasters e.g. *delubyo*, *ᜏ᜚᜔ᜃᜅ* *tsu-balod*, *ᜏ᜚᜔ᜃᜅ* *tsu-alon*, *ᜏ᜚᜔ᜃᜅ* *silakbô*, *ᜏ᜚᜔ᜃᜅ* *daluyong*, or *ᜏ᜚᜔ᜃᜅ* *humbak*, *ᜏ᜚᜔ᜃᜅ* Tacloban, or *ᜏ᜚᜔ᜃᜅ* *karak-an*. Mapping indigenous knowledges on to the landscape through collective participatory sessions are crucial for reviving relationships with the ecology.

- Seasons and Climate Change: It is urgent to engage women most especially from households living directly alongside the rivers, streams and creeks, and deeper into marshes where roads remain unpaved [Figure 12]. These women from lower income households are the most neglected by government services and often have not completed formal schooling and therefore most marginalized and vulnerable to disasters in the municipality. They, however, remain most knowledgeable of the surrounding ecology and the direct impacts felt from climate change being fishers, nipa weavers, or launders who subsist directly from the rivers and sea. Educational workshops must be engage them to document their knowledges of seasons, the weather, and waters for establishing an appropriate, inclusive and effective DRRM plan.
- Storytelling: Facilitated storytelling circles are needed for re-enacting and re-embodying the Waray's ferocity. I imagine that more opportunities for sharing survival testimonies through community theatre and other arts-based workshops will heighten the women's understanding of their own capacities and strength to mobilize and organize collective efforts to address disaster preparedness and other issues. Women in Palo take on a variety of leadership positions in their communities, including serving as *barangay* health care workers, church leaders, teachers, parents' and vendors' associations in schools. Although they have not been formally recognized and incorporated in government-led DRRM and

development efforts, they need to demonstrate and testify for one another the similar ferocity they act with.

- Refuge: As a common space, these modest structures built from the local materials of woven nipa and coco lumber should not be restricted to a particular use, but may double as a childcare centre, a meeting place, and a safe space to discuss issues pertaining to gender based violence. Most importantly, these centres can hopefully serve as a halfway home for women fleeing domestic abuse, and may serve as a facility to support GABRIELA Leyte's advocacies.

Lola Nilda is a well-respected lay religious leader in Barangay San Miguel, and is often asked to lead those who mourn in group prayer vigils to care for the village's dead. Lola Fe is a retired municipal engineer and remains knowledgeable in distinguishing between sound and poor construction of flood control infrastructure. Katkat, Ate Marielle, Melanie, and other young



Figure 12: A fishing household living deep in the Binahaan Watershed

mothers in Palo speak fearlessly about their experiences of domestic abuse, absentee partners, and their struggles as single mothers and aspiring migrant workers. Nanay Lilia, Nanay Rosela and Nanay Lydia, like many other *barangay* health workers who serve into their senior years, maintain their

barangay health centres in caring for women’s health. Kapitana Malverosa remains to be the only female *barangay* captain in Palo, and the fiercest one in advocating for her *kababayen-an*, her co-women, to safety. Ma’am Connie of GABRIELA Leyte continues to work with a militancy in monitoring reports of sexual assaults and trafficked women in Palo, while healing her wounds from surviving Yolanda’s floods. Ma’am Altea, like many other women leading initiatives in the newly constructed Women Friendly Spaces, still mourn the families they lost. Yet they work with great zeal in re-learning about storm surges, typhoons, and how to respect the water bodies surrounding their villages in the Binahaan Watershed. How can Waray survivance ensue without the women?

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Kababayen-an han karak-an: after centuries of colonial invasions, deluges of violence, and the strongest storm in recorded history, the women of storm surges, of an ancient ferocity, refuse to die away. Our people are here to stay.

Afterword

“Low Carbon Poem, Renewable Energy”

By Steffi Tad-y

For Chaya Ocampo Go and Melina Laboucan Massimo

November 13th 2015

Naomi Klein writes in the storm, love
will save this place
we cry and laugh, add
yesses, and yes we believe
we will have none of it, erase
submerged populations,
scholarly, scientific love.
will save this place, so does
laughter, how many miles
do we generate from this matter
make no mistake, LNG,
it is not my place, here
is a bottle of Sacred Waters.
seven thousand one hundred
seven islands will drown
laughing in the tide
echoing Nation after Nation
in this state, unsettled,
do we have to.
My Uncle and i, on Haudenosaunee
Ojibway Territories, watched
the Maiden of Mist tear
across the water –
unknowing of the border –
Uncle Henry says,
“Look, Steffi, look. Take
a look at all that power.”

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Appendix

This family tree was prepared by Lola Fe Josol in the summer of 2015.

The names coloured orange indicate those I met and lived with during my fieldwork.

The names coloured red indicate how the Noveloso and Josol households are related. My great grandmother, Teresa Noveloso, is the sister of Cristina Noveloso. This is how I am related to my grandmother's cousins.

My great grandmother, Lola Teresa, is cousins with Leonarda Monge, the mother of Lola Fe and Lola Filea. The Josol household hosted me in their house as my grand-aunts.

1. Teresa Novelo (+) Husband: Jose CO Chong Yok		2. Cristina Novelo (+) Husband: Margarito HOLANDA (I)															
1. (Sort) (?)	2. Maria Remedios Novelo (OCAMPO) Husband: Yu Jin Huat		1. Ethelwoldo HOLANDA Wife: Norma (?)	2. Nestorio HOLANDA Wife: (?) Palto	3. Ma. Nilda Holanda Husband: Jesus BARRERA				4. Noemi Holanda	5. Freida Holanda (+) Husband: Roman GARCIA		6. Maño HOLANDA Wife: Carolina Pacheco					
	1. Deanie Lyn Ocampo Husband: Willie GO	2. Terence OCAMPO Wife: Rosette Go	3. Spencer OCAMPO Wife: Ma. Lourdes Navarro	?	?	1. Madelaine Barrera Husband: Floyd BAUTISTA	2. Jesse James BARRERA Wife: (?)	3. Miriam Barrera Husband: Peter (?)	4. Jan BARRERA	5. Jennifer Barrera	6. Marielle Barrera	1. Jeffrey GARCIA	2. Janice Garcia	3. Jonathan GARCIA Wife: (?)	1. Mark HOLANDA Wife: (?)	2. Maricris Holanda Husband: (?)	3. Maybelle Holanda
	1. Chaysa Go	1. Nathan Ocampo	1. Joaquin Ocampo (+)	?	?	1. Aleck Baujista	1. Marian Barrera	1. Julian		1. Alexa Salangang	1. Ysa Aray			?	?	?	
	2. Danya Go	2. Sadie Ocampo	2. Paolo Ocampo			2. Alyssa Baujista	2. Christine Barrera			2. Angela Salangang	2. Colleen Duquiatan						
	3. Gillian Go	3. Lexie Ocampo	3. Iaha Ocampo				3. Marjorie Barrera			3. Ashley Salangang	3. Yuri Duquiatan						

Leonarda Monge (+) Husband: Vicente JOSOL (+)															
1. Filea Josol (single)	2. Fe Josol Husband: Ignacio LIPAYON				3. Fileo Claudio JOSOL (+) Wife: Agnes Jacola				4. Fidel JOSOL Wife: Ma. Corazon Cajoles		5. Fidelino JOSOL Wife: Ma. Nirma Eili				
	1. Karina Lipayon (single)	2. Kristyn Lipayon (single)	3. Jay Arwin Lipayon (single)	4. Kaye Marie Lipayon (single) Tayshaun Emmanuel Callera	1. Josefina Josol (single)	2. Jessica Josol (single)	3. Jezeel Josol (single)	4. Joan Josol Husband: _____ John Josol - son	5. Jejomar Josol (single)	1. Jairus Carmela Josol (single)	2. Maccabeo JOSOL (single)	1. Leonard Vincent JOSOL (single)	2. Dominic Ross JOSOL (single)	3. Mary Frances JOSOL (single)	4. Sandra Angelica JOSOL (single)