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All That Remains: Typhoons and Trauma in Three Philippine Novels in English

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Abstract

In November 2013, one of the most powerful typhoons ever recorded ravaged the Visayas region of the Philippines. Typhoon Haiyan, locally known as Typhoon Yolanda, caused the deaths of over 6,500 Filipinos. Years later, many are still missing. The devastation caused by typhoons such as Typhoon Haiyan is not new to the Philippines, considering the country encounters around 20 tropical cyclones every year. It is not surprising, then, that natural disasters figure heavily in Philippine literature. This is evident in three Philippine novels in English: Broken Islands (2019) by Criselda Yabes, Remains (2019) by Daryll Delgado, and Tiempo Muerto (2019) by Caroline Hau. Using Sigmund Freud's concept of "remembering, repeating, and working-through," this study analyzes the three novels as patients in recovery after the trauma of natural disaster. These three novels are then connected to Ernest Renan's concept of nationhood, Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, as well as Pierre Nora's concept of lieux de memoire in order to illustrate the importance of disaster narratives in the creation and preservation of a nation's identity.

Keywords: Anthropocene; disaster; ecotrauma; typhoons; Philippines

Introduction

In November 2013, one of the most powerful typhoons ever recorded ravaged the Visayas region of the Philippines. When news stations and publications like *The New York Times* began reporting on the storm, it was believed that approximately only a hundred people had died (Whaley). Today, over a decade later, the death toll of Typhoon Haiyan, locally known as Typhoon Yolanda, stands at around 6,500 with many still missing (Gutierrez). The devastation caused by typhoons is not new to the Philippines. According to the Philippine Department of Science and Technology's Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration, the Philippine Area of Responsibility is the region most affected by tropical cyclones in the entire world, encountering around 20 tropical cyclones every year. In 2021, a typhoon comparable to Haiyan once again passed through the Philippines, in an area not far from where Haiyan mainly hit. When Typhoon Rai, locally known as Typhoon Odette, made landfall in the Philippines, it became known across the globe as one of the strongest storms of 2021. Governor Kaka Bag-ao of the Dinagat Islands, a group of islands affected by the typhoon, commented at the time, "Our landscape in the aftermath is reminiscent if not worse than when Yolanda hit our province" (ABS-CBN News). By then, eight years had passed since Typhoon Haiyan, and yet it seemed to still be fresh in the region's, and the country's, memory.

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This is nothing new for the Philippines, one of the world's most disaster-prone countries, falling victim to typhoons and volcanic activity every year because of its position in the Pacific and the Pacific Ring of Fire. According to a 2020 study by Bollettino et al., "Global climate change is expected to impact the Philippines both in terms of shifting weather patterns, and, even more dangerously, by the rising sea levels, which will impact coastal communities and low-lying urban areas (1-2). One of their study's findings was a negative link between the time one resides in a place and how prepared they were for disaster. "It is unclear why this might be" (ibid., 12), but the researchers proposed that those who have lived in a community longer believe they have had more experience with disasters, which affects their participation in disaster preparedness activities. The study does, however, state that "an individual's involvement in his/her community...does have a large influence" (ibid., 12).

Sometimes, this involvement in community takes the form of literature. The novels *Broken Islands* (2019), *Tiempo Muerto* (2019), and *Remains* (2019) all involve typhoons, communities affected and displaced by them, and protagonists attempting to make sense of the immediate aftermath. Typhoons, memory, and literature are deeply intertwined, particularly in the three novels highlighted in this study. Above all, however, each of these three novels deals with the concept of trauma. This study will examine and map out the place of trauma and memory in the aforementioned novels with the help of Sigmund Freud's "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through" (1914) and Ernest Renan's *What is a Nation?* (1882). Following literary analyses of the primary texts, this study will then investigate the place of the novels themselves in relation to the Philippine nation, aided by concepts such as Marianne Hirsch's "postmemory" and Pierre Nora's *les lieux de memoire*.

Most critics of Philippine literature in English agree that most contemporary Philippine novels deal with issues of nation and history. Jose Dalisay writes, "The country's tortuous political history has given rise to many opportunities for direct engagement in political resistance by Filipino authors" (2007). If Philippine novels had once been centered on political events such as World War II, Martial Law, and the People Power Revolution of 1986, today they tackle even wider themes such as the diaspora, globalization, and the environment. Still, history and the nation remain at the forefront. Fictionist and critic Cristina Pantoja Hidalgo even argues that history does not just act as the setting to many of these novels but drives the plot and can often be regarded as a character in itself (2000, 334).

In the following novels, history is embodied by the typhoon.

Disaster Narratives and Defining Trauma

Broken Islands by Criselda Yabes, *Remains* by Daryll Delgado, and *Tiempo Muerto* by Caroline Hau—all released in 2019—have been well-received critically and globally since their publication. In 2022, *Broken Islands* was included in a list by the Ateneo University Press for women's rights and gender equality. In 2021, *Remains* was showcased at the Frankfurt Book Fair. In 2022, *Tiempo Muerto* was one of four books published by the Ateneo de Naga University Press featured at the 2022 London International Book Fair. All three were nominated for Best Novel in English at the 39th National Book Awards, with *Tiempo Muerto* winning the award in 2022. With the success of these books and their authors, it is no surprise, then, that before all the acclaim, they were asked to come together on 27 November 2020 for the hour-long video conference "A Novel Conversation: Aesthetics and Disaster Politics" to discuss their novels in relation to gender, disaster fiction, and social inequalities.

Speaking about trauma and disaster, however, is a tricky subject considering trauma in the context of climate change has been quite difficult to define. Lee Zimmerman, in his 2020 monograph *Trauma and the Discourse of Climate Change*, wrote:

...as opposed to “catastrophe” or “disaster,” “trauma” not only refers to violent happenings but also raises questions about how these happenings are or aren’t known and experienced, how knowing or experiencing those happenings is felt to dissolve the knower itself—its “frames of reference” and “modes of thought,” as Timothy Clark puts it (132)—and thus cannot be processed into meaning or intelligibility, remaining, in Caruth’s still telling phrase, an “unclaimed experience,” or, in other psychoanalytic contexts, provoking what D. W. Winnicott terms “unthinkable anxiety” (Playing 97) or W. R. Bion calls “nameless dread” (16). (12)

The term “trauma” is imprecise and implies a violence having occurred in the past, but climate change and discourse surrounding it tend to lean toward futures thinking. “In seeming to focus on the present in relation to the catastrophes of the past, moreover, the discourse of trauma might seem by definition to deflect attention from how the present is implicated in the production of catastrophes in the future” (ibid., 13). What Zimmerman proposes is a look back at Rob Nixon’s *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), which delves into the pervasiveness of violence across space and time in such a way that it is not immediately evident but can be proven through data over a span of years. Zimmerman writes:

Nixon stresses that “a central question is strategic and representational: how can we convert into image and narrative the disasters that are slow moving and long in the making, disasters that are anonymous and star nobody, disasters that are ... of indifferent interest to the sensation-driven technologies of our image-world?” (ibid., 18)

One way artists have been attempting to acknowledge, portray, and spread the word about climate change is through fiction. When fictionists tackle a topic as serious as climate change, the goal is “not about falsifying it, or making it imaginary, but rather about using narrative to heighten its reality” considering the grand, global scale of the crisis (Trexler, 2015, 75). At the same time, however, novels tend to focus on specific places rather than the world, globe, or planet. Trexler attributes this to American and British environmentalists, who put an emphasis on a community’s “sense of place, which carries meaning,” rather than the vague term “space” (ibid., 75). Places have and are sources of history, connections, identity, and culture; focusing on certain places and their links to humans has been hope for environmentalists that “conservation would come to seem a natural, intrinsic, and self-preserving impulse for all people” (ibid., 76). Through fiction and concrete narratives, readers could be exposed to climate change and all the suffering it causes. Trexler continues:

Creating a connection between the reader and characters immersed in disastrous global warming, readers could immediately experience climate change as a threat to their centers of felt value. Thus, fiction would reposition climate change as a fundamental concern for the wider public. (ibid., 76)

All three of the novels to be analyzed in this essay accomplish just that: a repositioning of climate change as a fundamental concern for Filipinos and other readers, whether the novel

is set in a fictional town or the natural disaster is a typhoon carved into the Philippines' consciousness.

Broken Islands, for instance, is permeated by the grief and brokenness experienced by victims and survivors of Typhoon Yolanda in the Visayas. Set in the holidays between 2015 and 2016, only two years after the typhoon struck the Philippines, the novel is told in at least two voices: the University of the Philippines-educated Luna and her family's helper, Alba. What sets this novel apart from others is its attention to language and place/environment to shed light on the sensibilities of the region and the personal grief they experienced as opposed to the number of fatalities reported on the news. Yabes, who is also a journalist, inserts a few italicized sections throughout *Broken Islands* that resemble news bits, explaining the destruction Tacloban and its surrounding provinces experienced under Yolanda. These facts foreground what happens behind the scenes, on the ground, where Yabes spent time reporting the news in 2013. These italicized sections hint at the pages of untold stories that exist for every short article released in times of disaster.

Tiempo Muerto by Caroline Hau, though it begins with the disappearance of Racel's mother Alma amid a typhoon, does not place as much emphasis on natural disasters as *Broken Islands* but on colonial history, feudalism, and the diaspora. The main characters, Racel and Lia, both come from the fictional island of Banwa but eventually settle in Singapore on separate paths, only to return to Banwa. Though many novels deal with the point of view of a helper or *kasambahay*, like *Broken Islands*, *Tiempo Muerto* is exceptional in its depiction of Racel. The chapters in *Tiempo Muerto* alternate between Racel and Lia's stories. However, only Racel's chapters are in the first-person point of view; Lia's chapters are told in the third-person. Racel's chapters are also significantly longer than Lia's and delve into the life and sensibilities of an Overseas Contractual Worker; this can mean listing the specific requirements she had to submit early in the novel before being able to work abroad (Hau, 2019, 22) or describing how the kitchen is her kingdom (ibid., 8) and contemplating how she must navigate her relationship with the Agalons as well as the others in Banwa whom she left behind.

Remains by Daryll Delgado is situated in the thick of the aftermath of Typhoon Yolanda. In it, we follow the character Ann, who travels to Tacloban as part of a non-government organization as well as in the hope of learning more about her family. Like *Broken Islands*, *Remains* features sections of real news about the typhoon. Additionally, the novel includes transcripts and interviews, some in the Waray language with English translation, with survivors of the disaster. These parts of the novel add to the text's fragmentedness, illustrating how confused and lost survivors must feel in the aftermath. It is through this lens that this study aims to analyze the three novels using Freud's concept of "remembering, repeating, and working-through," as novel-patients recovering from the trauma of natural disaster.

Freud: The Novels as Patients

In his 1914 essay, Freud discusses the act of remembering and the act of repeating as a form of recollection of repressed memories, thought-connections, and experiences. Often, patients forget, "dissolving thought-connections, failing to draw the right conclusions and isolating memories" (149). When a patient does not remember what they must, they might have the compulsion to reproduce or repeat it as an action without "knowing that he is repeating it" as a form of remembering (ibid., 150). This process of repetition and acting out one's memories is, according to Freud, a symbol of great resistance (ibid., 151). To treat the illness would mean

to treat the patient's past by tracing the past and treating their past as a present-day force (ibid., 152). In other words, the past does not belong in the past alone. The next step would be to give the patient time to work through their illness:

This working-through of the resistances may in practice turn out to be an arduous task for the subject of the analysis and a trial of patience for the analyst. Nevertheless it is a part of the work which effects the greatest changes in the patient and which distinguishes analytic treatment from any kind of treatment by suggestion. (ibid., 155-156)

All three of the novels in this essay are ripe for examples of remembering, repeating, and working through the trauma of a typhoon, albeit in various ways.

Trauma in Broken Islands

Trauma abounds in *Broken Islands*. Yabes is not from the Visayas, but Zamboanga; the short Waray and Bisaya phrases she includes in parts of the novel instead act as “local color,” but even without these, one manages to feel the world of the Visayas in the text. The various languages that are used in the novel speak of the fragmentation that exists in the region, which is most evident in terms of class, with Luna and her family speaking English and Alba speaking a broken type of English. Still, the grief resulting from Typhoon Yolanda often sets in, and at one point a character describes depression itself as “a mute language” (Yabes, 2019, 70)—the type of language anyone can speak, regardless of class and location.

This depression is intertwined with the concept of trauma in the novel, with almost each character having experienced a sort of trauma as a result of the typhoon.

Every main character, and a few minor ones, has trauma to overcome. At the beginning of the novel, Luna says of Crispin Cimafranca, “He left after Yolanda broke us” (ibid., 5), implying her father was affected enough by the typhoon to leave his family and chase after birds. Manoy's trauma lies in his inability to see his uncle's face in the dark, “in this damn mountain that damned my father's life” (ibid., 178). Alba also has strong emotions about the typhoon:

I cry sometimes thinking of my mother, how she died in the typhoon. We had nothing and then we lost everything. Yolanda gave us no mercy. (ibid., 72)

Pilo medicates his trauma of losing his wife and children to the typhoon with alcohol, but Alba criticizes him, saying, “He is not the only person in the world losing a family taken by Yolanda” (Yabes, 2019, 189). Even Kiko, a foreigner living in Borbon, experienced the trauma of losing his library: “For some days afterwards he raved mad of paranoia, pushed by the shock of the typhoon never before imagined” (ibid., 66). On the other hand, Luna's trauma is less about the typhoon and more about her parents: her mother's absence and her father's death. She remembers her last moments with them and involuntarily repeats actions and emotions. She says:

When I see my uncle leave for work, an irrational mood begins to kick in. This feeling that you're about to be abandoned. I hold back the painful knots in my heart. Death might follow him, the way it followed Dad. (ibid., 46)

By the end of the novel, the two main characters, Luna and Alba, have “worked through” their traumas. Alba, portrayed as the simpler of the two, finds happiness in rain, the life of a bird, the air coming through a window, and fireworks:

“I’m not afraid anymore. This is a happy sound in my ears... People in Leyte can see this I’m sure, they’re just across us, you can see their island... If they see the colors in heaven, they will know God is with them... I hope people in Leyte and also my friends in Samar are seeing this. I hope finally they are not afraid of Yolanda, it will go away forever and ever. Because this is the feeling when fireworks go forever and ever to beautiful music.” (ibid., 182)

Luna’s “working through” is embodied by her deciding to run for mayor in the next election, despite her initial reluctance to spend time in Borbon at the beginning of the novel. The trauma rooted in Borbon’s sky and land, as portrayed in Luna and Alba’s alternating chapters, invites the reader to imagine place as a common denominator among the characters. In fact, in some chapters, the narrator refers to the reader directly as “you,” addressing us almost as actors in their story. We are also given insight into local sensibilities, with fishermen described as laboring with the sea as an act of love. Overall, *Broken Islands* is able to translate the sensibility of a grieving Visayas even without the constant use of Bisayan or Waray language, also fostering an appreciation of place.

Trauma in Tiempo Muerto

As *Tiempo Muerto* is mainly situated on the fictional island of Banwa, the typhoon is also left unnamed, symbolic of how typhoons in general tend to ravage entire communities in the Philippines. The novel begins with Racel, a helper in Singapore, discovering that her mother has disappeared since the typhoon the week before. Because the novel is mainly told from her first-person perspective, many of the examples of remembering, repeating, and working through trauma in *Tiempo Muerto* revolve around Racel.

Racel remembers of Singapore, “they do not worry about typhoons...since strong ones pass over only once in a while” (Hau, 2019, 8). When she remembers a volcanic eruption in Banwa, she remembers, “Some stayed and died. We don’t have museums in Banwa. People disappear. Or they go away” (ibid., 13). She also displays a desire to forget or a reluctance to remember, telling herself, “I must not think of things that happened long ago. I am here to find my mother and take her with me away from this blasted island” (ibid., 56).

In *Tiempo Muerto*, the protagonists and readers are faced with the trauma of the typhoon after the fact. Upon her return to Banwa, Racel says:

What I see now fills me with dread.

The nipahuts are blind and mute. All bear wounds from the typhoon, some more grievous than the others. One or two are missing their roofs; others have been brought to their knees; and still others have toppled over on their sides, legs jutting obscenely in the air. (Hau, 2019, 59)

As Racel travels through various *barangays*—the Filipino term for village or district—she is confronted by “wounds inflicted by the typhoon” that “remain open and raw” (Hau, 2019,

161). She comes to the realization that, if her mother's body is ever found, it might never be identified because she might not have been carrying an ID with her:

I think of my mother struck by flying debris and lying in a gutter; my mother sinking below the risen water of a storm surge; my mother borne away by the flood to who knows where; my mother robbed and killed by someone desperate or heatless. (ibid., 165-166)

Her ruminations about her mother continue throughout the novel, until she begins to “work through” her trauma and accept the reality that her mother might now be at peace in death:

I try to imagine what is worse: Nay washed ashore on some beach like so much rubbish, May offering her body to the maggots and feral dogs by the roadside, Nay flat on her back at the autopsy and embalming station, as words and laughter spill out of onlookers, passersby, and uniformed attendants and swirl around her corpse. Better to think of Nay at the bottom of the sea, freed of flesh and bone. (ibid., 193)

Racel's “working through” trauma is deeply tied to place: Mount Balaan and the island of Banwa. She describes Mount Balaan as a symbol of hope, offering “refuge to those who have sought its protection, away from the problems of the plains and valleys” (ibid., 236). As she comes to terms with her mother's disappearance and possible death, her dreams also give way to more peaceful illusions as she imagines her mother cradling her hands “in the pillow warmth of hers” (ibid., 268).

Trauma in Remains

Like *Broken Islands*, *Remains* deals with the aftermath of the real-life Typhoon Yolanda, beginning with news quotes about how the natural disaster developed over a span of hours. The main point of return in the “remembering, repeating, and working-through” in this novel is one sense: that of scent. As Ann arrives in Tacloban, she says, “I could almost smell it as soon as I saw it—the rotting, the decay” (Delgado, 2019, 2). She emphasizes what she is able to smell a few pages later: “DECAYED, DILAPIDATED, ROTTEN. *Dunot*,” the last being the Waray term for something rotten or festering (ibid., 6).

As Ann talks to her sister, Alice, she is told to choose to forget. In her family, there is a reluctance to remember. Alice says:

There are questions you simply can't allow yourself to ask, or find answers to. What happened in the house years ago, what happened to Tito Jun, to our family, all that's beyond the scope of your work there, Ann. (ibid., 13)

Still, this does not stop Ann from exploring Tacloban, looking for answers to family secrets and allowing memories to come flooding back. She reminisces about her family's old house, saying, “On rainy nights, during typhoon season, from inside the house, we would hear the furious crashing of the waves against the seawall, and knew that the floor would follow suit” (ibid., 43). Their house was also a source of trauma, having caused Alice's ears to hurt due to the sound of it swaying during a typhoon in 1984. Again, however, it all leads back to scent for Ann:

I had other memories of that typhoon. The smell of the ocean, for instance, which became more intense, darker, denser. In fact, before the storm, I could already sense

a shift, something thick, almost spicy, in the air. And, of course, the smell of rotting and decay that pervaded the air, after the storm. But, as usual, no one wanted to listen to me. (ibid., 43)

By the end of *Remains*, Ann is able to work through her resistance to the smell of decay by relating them to less violent and more pleasant scents such as “citrus, nail polish, bananas, coconut oil” (ibid., 259). She would “smell the smells” (ibid., 262) as she reread her notes from her trip, but some time outdoors helps her recover from the remembering as she focuses on scents of life instead of death:

Scents from the kitchen next door wafted to me, temporarily overpowering others that I knew would manifest again very soon. I soaked in the smells, intoxicating signs of life that had nothing to do with me, which allowed myself to revel in privately. (ibid., 321)

Postmemory and Shared Suffering

In 1882, French historian Ernest Renan gave a lecture on what it means to be a nation. He recognized that nations were “something rather new in history,” and thus, needed to be defined by more than just race or language. His lecture was an attempt at creating criteria by which the public could define what constitutes a nation. Race and language would be out of the picture, considering “there are no pure races” and the same “must also be said of language” (ibid.). Renan also rejects the notion of religion, communities of interest, and geography as being the defining points of a nation. Instead, he lays the groundwork for the nation as a soul:

One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories; the other is present consent, the desire to live together, the desire to continue to invest in the heritage that we have jointly received. Messieurs, man does not improvise. The nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotions. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate: our ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past with great men and glory (I mean true glory) is the social capital upon which the national idea rests. (ibid.)

According to Renan, “shared suffering unites more than does joy.” The nation’s foundation is moral conscience, its citizens’ dedication to the nation’s communal good, and its history of shared suffering, which contributes to national memory more than “triumphs because they impose duties and require a common effort.” The criteria proposed by Renan for nationhood ends with reiteration by consent of citizens; in his words, consent would mean “the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life.”

By Renan’s logic, the three novels’ protagonists’ processes of “working through” their communities’ post-typhoon shared suffering is evidence of their consent to continue being part of the nation. Trauma from natural disasters united them. In *Broken Islands*, the typhoon reunites Luna with her hometown and family, leading her to decide to run for mayor of Borbon by the end of the novel. In *Tiempo Muerto*, the typhoon forces Racel to confront her past in Banwa, reuniting her with the community with whom she grew up: “I think of how, on Banwa, we lived daily on sufferance” (Hau, 2019, 50). In *Remains*, Ann voluntarily returns to Tacloban, where she tolerates the scent of decay, interacts with other survivors of Typhoon Yolanda, and records these interactions both for work and for posterity.

The need to develop a connection with places as well as the need to identify with one's nation are particularly important considering increasing research proving climate change is real, and "the poor and those living in coastal areas," including the Philippines, "are among the many millions that will bear the brunt of these changes," (Bollettino et al., 2020, 12). Unfortunately, Bollettino et al.'s research points to varying levels of awareness of climate change and its impacts on the Philippines (2020)—evidence of the urgent need for more literature about climate change, natural disasters, survivors, and victims.

Because *Broken Islands* and *Remains*, in particular, are about a real typhoon, they serve as venues of postmemory: "the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, 2008, 103). Though comparatist Marianne Hirsch first defined the term in relation to the Holocaust, the concept of postmemory can be applied to any situation in which transgenerational transmission of trauma occurs. She writes:

These terms reveal a number of controversial assumptions: that descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation's remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection *memory* and thus that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory *can* be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event. (ibid., 105-106)

While the inheritance of trauma or traumatic histories is most evident in *Broken Islands* and *Remains* considering their inclusion of factual sections about Typhoon Yolanda, the concept of postmemory is evident in all three novels analyzed in this essay.

In *Broken Islands*, Luna's grandmother's rose garden was destroyed in a storm similar to Typhoon Yolanda—"not as big but big enough to smash her roses and uproot the mango trees" (Yabes, 2019, 35). The trauma of typhoons is passed down through Luna's family. In *Tiempo Muerto*, Racel admits that the stories she would tell her ward, Sophie, were stories her mother told her about Banwa (Hau, 2019, 12). In *Remains*, Ann's conversation with Mano Pater is an example of postmemory in process, of trauma being passed down through stories:

"See, Leyte was merely a convenient location from which to launch the attack. Typhoon stranded them here, caused them so much inconvenience, so much delay, truth be told," Mano Pater said...

"The typhoons stranded them in Leyte? Not the people? Not the Japanese? What about the Pulahan, did they not fight the Americans with their anting-anting, their amulets?" (Delgado, 2019, 27)

In many ways, Hirsch echoes Renan's notions about nationhood when she writes, "The growth of memory culture may, indeed, be a symptom of a need for inclusion in a collective membrane forged by a shared inheritance of multiple traumatic histories and the individual and social responsibility we feel toward a persistent and traumatic past" (2008, 111). In Hirsch's postmemory, we see Renan's shared suffering. In Hirsch's explanation of individual and social responsibility, we see Renan's reiteration of consent to continue being part of the nation. Both these concepts can also be viewed from the perspective of French historian Pierre Nora's *lieux de memoire*.

The Three Novels as *Lieux de Memoire*

Lieux de memoire is what Nora referred to the phenomenon when “memory crystallizes and secretes itself...at a particular historical moment, a turning point where consciousness of a break with the past is bound up with the sense that memory has been torn—but torn in such a way as to pose the problem of the embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” (1989, 7). *Lieux de memoire*, or “sites of memory,” are meant to be differentiated from *milieux de memoire*, or “real environments of memory.” *Lieux de memoire* are sites of memory in concrete form: museums, monuments, rituals, cemeteries, and archives, among others. “The moment of *lieux de memoire* occurs at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears” (ibid., 11-12), both allowing and forcing these sites of memory to store the memories that have or could easily be collectively forgotten.

Nora suggests that *lieux de memoire* exist because of a lack of spontaneous memory; in other words, communities must continue to create and maintain archives and other forms of *lieux de memoire* to continue to remember. A *lieux de memoire*, he writes, must be material, symbolic, and functional (ibid., 19), all at the same time. It is also important to note that, like Renan and Hirsch, Nora emphasizes the need for “a will to remember” (ibid., 19).

Through Freud’s concept of “remembering, repeating, and working-through,” we have seen how the characters in *Broken Islands*, *Tiempo Muerto*, and *Remains* show a reluctance, but then, eventually, a willingness to remember the trauma of the typhoons that ravaged their lands. This need to remember and uncover memories of their own or of their families links back to Nora’s assertion that *milieux de memoire*, the real environment of memory, has disappeared. In fact, he writes, “We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left” (ibid., 7).

While the novels’ characters themselves would not constitute as *lieux de memoire*, the novels could. They are each material, which means they are portable and tangible. They are all symbolic, demonstrating a link between the novel and the events described in them—whether they be about an actual typhoon or a fictional one, representative of any and every typhoon that has ever impacted the Philippines. Last, each of the novels is functional, allowing readers to experience *milieux de memoire*, however devastating it might be.

Preserving *Lieux de Memoire*, Remembering Trauma

At first, it would seem counterproductive to dwell on trauma: death, decay, and all. But trauma narratives “have been recognized as valuable in helping illuminate how people come to make sense of the violence done within disaster” (Henry, 2007, 114). By portraying the immediate aftermaths of typhoons from the perspectives of various characters, authors Yabes, Hau, and Delgado show how differently Filipinos come to terms with trauma. The protagonists of each of the novels show a reluctance to remember the pain of the disaster, while others cannot stop remembering or repeating behavior in relation to their trauma. In the end, what these three novels have in common—aside from everything mentioned above—is their characters’ reliance and comfort in community.

Though some characters from the novels might not speak the same language, it is suggested in *Broken Islands* that their common language is depression due to trauma. By the end of the novel, however, Yabes writes, “Our common language is in the touch of our hands, in our pain” (2019, 278). *Broken Islands*, *Tiempo Muerto*, and *Remains* are examples of tangible *lieux de memoire*, sharing a common language not only with their readers but with the nation.

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