

philippine studies: historical and ethnographic viewpoints

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Women of Storm Surges: Meaning Making as Cultural Process of Social Repair for Yolanda Survivors

Chaya Ocampo Go

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints
vol. 65 no. 2 (2017): 227–56

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies.soss@ateneo.edu.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>

Women of Storm Surges Meaning Making as Cultural Process of Social Repair for Yolanda Survivors

Years after Typhoon Yolanda (international code name: Haiyan) struck Leyte island in the Eastern Visayas region in 2013, I conduct a feminist ethnographic research and inquire into the ways Waray women survivors make meaning of this super typhoon and how they mobilize disaster memory and symbolisms in their survival testimonies to engage in social repair. In showing how the women survivors (a) personify the storm; (b) explain order and safety in cycles and seasons; and (c) explain syncretic theologies pertaining to ideas of justice, I argue that they enact an ancient ferocity as a form of agency for survival.

KEYWORDS: ANTHROPOLOGY OF DISASTERS · TYPHOON HAIYAN/YOLANDA · FEMINIST ETHNOGRAPHY · LEYTE · DECOLONIZING METHODOLOGY

“**W**ARAY BARO! WARAY KWARTA! WARAY BALAY! WARAY! *Nawara nga tanan!*” (“No clothes! No money! No house! Nothing! Everything was taken away!”), Katkat (2015) flung her arms in exasperation, her hair falling messy on her face as she exclaimed. The loose bun on her head must have been as weary as her body felt. We sat around on wooden benches outside a *sari-sari* (variety) store, each of us sipping bottled sodas in the exhausting heat. Katkat, a mother in her twenties, left her babies with an older neighbor who lived in the shanty next to hers. This freed her some time to sit with us—Ate Marielle, Katkat’s childhood friend and my aunt, and myself, the visiting researcher. Yolanda took everything of the little she had, she insisted. Like many mothers at the height of the storm, Katkat clasped her baby to her chest, cradled and breastfed him to lull him to some sleep and to calm herself down. She and other women in the evacuation center took turns holding each other’s children; Katkat’s sister-in-law too served as a wet nurse for her child when she fell tired. Yolanda’s fury shook their house down, Katkat demonstrated with closed fists shaking wildly—“but her body is bruised by her husband’s fists too!” interjected Ate Marielle, angered by her friend’s long-standing struggle against domestic abuse years before Yolanda, and still after the storm had passed.

“Waray”! 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 neighbors 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 *siya!*” (She’s a social worker!).¹ She would brag about my false identity to the neighbors, as if it afforded her some temporary security. I reminded her to also visit the office of GABRIELA in order to seek immediate assistance from women’s rights advocates. In the meantime, I nodded to reassure her that she could tell her 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 (2015), my elder aunt in her sixties and a retired engineer, sighed in disappointment and with some shame at the acknowledged realities of her hometown. With melancholy she proceeded to teach me: “This is who the Waray is. Nothing is left, but we still have something. Nothing is left, but we still have something” (*Ganyan ang Waray. Wala na, pero meron pa rin. Wala na, pero meron pa rin*).

Years after Typhoon Yolanda (international codename: Haiyan) ravaged the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines on 8 November 2013, survivors of Leyte island who were at the frontline of the strongest storm in recorded history have persisted through waves of disaster. Anthropologists of disaster contend that there is a need to trouble the assumed uniformity of disaster experiences (Oliver-Smith 1996; Oliver-Smith and Hoffman 1999, 2002) in the same manner that feminist scholars argue for an intersectional analysis of vulnerabilities shaped by race, gender, class, and other axes of difference (Enarson and Chakrabarti 2009; Enarson and Morrow 1998; Fordham 2012). Greg Bankoff (2003) further highlights the need to investigate “cultures of disasters”—a call for much more nuanced understandings of local cultures’ experiences of and adaptations to threats that are not only meteorological but also hazardous such as those in the form of chronic political, economic, and social crises.

Living on the sites of the earliest colonial invasions in the Philippines, and at the gateway of today’s intensifying storms from the Pacific due to the climate crisis, women of the Eastern Visayan region have long struggled with the highest poverty incidence in the country. This ethnographic study argues that it is valuable to inquire: How do Waray women survivors make meaning of Typhoon Yolanda as expressed in their survival testimonies and disaster symbolisms? How do they mobilize memories of Yolanda to engage in practices of social repair?

I conducted this on-site feminist ethnographic research in the town of Palo in the summer of 2015, interviewing twelve Waray women self-identified to be 25 to over 70 years old. The women hail from the three barangays of San Miguel, Salvacion, and Cogon, which stand in the Binahaan Watershed. With their houses and families mostly located along the Bangon and Binahaan Rivers and belonging to households predominantly of lower-income levels, these women were among the most vulnerable to the super typhoon—and such precariousness has characterized their lives long before and after Yolanda.

This article 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 together the women’s testimonies of survival as acts of resistance over the chronic crises of everyday poverty, Yolanda, and larger colonial histories. The Waray ferocity gleaned from their stories is not an essentialized trait of superhuman invincibility; rather than an indestructible inner resiliency

as defined by Western conception, it is instead an agentic force enacted not only in daily life but also in extraordinary circumstances persisting and insisting on survival, refusing death amidst tremendous violence. By naming their living world and embodied experiences of survival, I argue that Waray women survivors employ disaster memory as a cultural practice 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 gendered violence of poverty in the peripheries of a nation-state.

Women and Disasters: A Case for Feminist Ethnographic Research

In *Catastrophe and Culture* Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman (2002, 13) underscore the urgency for anthropologists to study disasters: “Not all communities experience a disaster in the same way or the same degree; each undergoes a catastrophe in the context of its own profile of vulnerability.” Scholars of applied anthropology working in the contexts of disaster, the authors assert, 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 and Hoffman 1999, 2002). In particular feminist disaster scholars and practitioners 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 and Chakrabarti 2009; Enarson and Morrow 1997; Oxfam Philippines 2014; Demetriades and Esplen 2008; Neumayer and 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 contributing scholars contest in *Cultures and Disasters* (Krüger et al. 2015).

Prominent feminist disaster anthropologist Elaine Enarson has laid the groundwork for examining gender in multidisciplinary and cross-cultural studies of disaster contexts. Among her many works, *The Gendered Terrain of Disasters* (Enarson and Morrow 1998) and *Women, Gender and Disaster* (Enarson and Chakrabarti 2009) span over two decades of gendered

vulnerability analysis, which the field of disaster studies arguably still lacks. Drawing on intersectional feminist analysis, Enarson (1998, 159) frames women’s vulnerabilities to disasters in these terms:

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.

Feminist disaster scholar Maureen Fordham similarly underscores how inequities prevail before, during, and after disasters: disasters are not neutral catastrophic forces, but discriminate against marginalized groups as do patriarchy, homophobia, racism, and other forces of oppression. Abundant case examples from the Philippines illustrate how women survivors of the 1991 Mount Pinatubo eruption were disadvantaged disproportionately with the loss of traditional income sources, while documentation of sexual harassment in typhoon evacuation camps and shelters revealed that gender-based violence targeted women and nonheterosexual bodies (Fordham 2012). Although cyclonic storms have shaped the archipelago, typhoons have not affected all people and geographies equally, revealing patterns of death and damage at their wake that were shaped by history and socioeconomic organizations (Warren 2016). Elaine Enarson’s (1998) call, made nearly a decade ago, for more research projects—including ethnographic portraits to examine patterns of gendered violence, oral histories and narratives focusing on power relations and indigenous knowledges—remains relevant today. This call has been taken up by both practitioners and academicians of disaster studies in a growing field of feminist studies.

Bankoff (2003, 5–17) argues that narratives of vulnerability to climate change and “natural” disasters are inherently Western discourses that 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. Cynthia Banzon-Bautista (2000, xvi), alongside other Filipino scholars of disasters, similarly challenges 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.” *In the Shadow of the Lingerin Mt. Pinatubo* underscores the clear connections between vulnerability and the poor’s political, socioeconomic, and geographic marginalization including how survivors cope with and struggle against lahar on a daily basis (Bautista 1993). In a similar tale of hauntings, the report IBON Foundation (2015) published a year after Yolanda details the waves upon waves of disaster unleashed on the victims in the form of state criminal negligence, corruption, patronage politics, and militarization. From these deathscapes this ethnographic project emerges to uncover Waray women survivors’ own voices: their survival testimonies attesting to their own ability to explain their collective experiences of a super typhoon that pounds repeatedly through the everyday gendered violence of poverty in the marginal geographies of the archipelagic nation-state.

Who is the Waray?

On 12 June 2015, the anniversary of Philippine Independence, my mother and I hailed a cab in Manila bound for the domestic airport. We were going to take our first flight together to Leyte island, where we previously 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. The cab driver, while engaging in an animated conversation with us, learned that his two Tagalog-speaking passengers have Waray heritage. As a Waray labor 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! Tingnan 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, ma’am! You’ll see; your ferocity will come out!

Manila folk have come to know the Waray—no retreat (*walang inaatasan*)—to not ever back down from anything and often make their

temper and ferocity known to others despite the discomfort they may arouse. Local historian and Yolanda survivor Rolando Borrinaga (2015a) writes that the proper ethnolinguistic term for his people is “Waraywaray,” sometimes spelled with a hyphen. But today people colloquially self-identify as “Waray”—a people characterized by an attitude of “brinkmanship,” the pursuit of something to its farthest limits (Borrinaga 2003). The repetition of “waray,” literally, “nothing,” seems to doubly emphasize the people’s extreme ability to persist until absolutely nothing remains. For instance, the popular 1954 film *Waray-Waray*, 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!) (Burns 2016, 322).

In examining the identity politics in Eartha Kitt’s performance of the song “Waray Waray,” Lucy Burns (ibid., 313) writes that the in/famous reputation of the Waray woman as the masculinization of the woman of rural origins was best exemplified by former first lady Imelda Marcos. Burns (ibid., 326) argues that Imelda highlighted her humble parochial (*probinsyana*) roots from rural Leyte as a means to navigate the strong regionalism characteristic of Philippine politics while advancing a national agenda, coalescing her superfluous eccentricities with the stereotypical shameless temper the Waray is known for. These iconic references reify the now popular stereotype of the Binisaya-speaking migrant worker in Manila, hailing from the Eastern Visayan provinces of Leyte and Samar and portrayed to be rather temperamental and quarrelsome, as Kitt sings a translation of the song from Tagalog:

Waray women will never flee, even in the face of death.
She will fight even the toughest of goons, come what may.
Waray Waray she is called.
In a fight, she will not back down
Even if you are a thug. (ibid., 319)

Borrinaga (2015a) traces this notion of ancient ferocity to the colonial archives. Spanish conquistadors called the Visayan *pintados* (painted) for their tattooed skins and notoriety in warfare. 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, 20). Although there is substantive evidence for Visayan women bearing tattoos in their hands and arms (ibid., 20–21), scant if any, historical documents name Waray women as *pintadas*. Such sexist logic undermined gender identity in the precolonial Philippines, and was launched by the Spaniards alongside racist colonial logic, which placed the near naked dark-skinned hunter-gatherers or *Negritos* at the bottom of civilization, the Austronesian *indio* one rank higher up this racial caste system that ascended to *mestizos* or those mixed with Chinese heritage, ultimately to Spaniards at the top. The Americans later replaced this position of White male supremacy with the United States’s colonial census of 1903–1905 reinforcing the preceding racialized imperial order. The tattooed Waray women seemed to have disappeared—although the modern pop song seems to bear an uncanny remembrance against the forced forgetting in the archives.

Bankoff (2004) writes that the country makes a most fascinating site for examining the sociocultural construction of hazards and people’s behaviors prior to, during, and after disasters. He argues that the very sites that have withstood intense proselytizing since the 1500s are also among the most seismically and meteorologically active landmasses on the planet, which have experienced the highest number of disasters during the twentieth century (ibid., 92). As do other disaster scholars, Bankoff (2003) 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.” My commitment to the writing of this ethnography foregrounds Waray women’s voices and their own embodied theorizing or meaning making of the disasters they have repeatedly endured across a continuum of colonial, gendered, racialized, political, and economic forms of violence in the postcolonial nation-state. While majority of those most vulnerable to disasters are situated farthest from globalized wealth and national centers and are often represented as “underdeveloped,” “traditional,” or “backward,” who are helpless in and ignorant of their own lives (Hewitt 2012), this project attests to the contrary: I argue that Waray women survivors, by naming their living world and embodied experiences of survival, reclaim an indigenous worldview and epistemology, enacting an ancient ferocity as a form of agency to survive everyday and extraordinary circumstances.

The women I spoke with in Palo agreed that most of them stayed at home full-time, especially if they had children to care for. “We are just at home waiting for our husbands!” (*Nasa bahay lang nag-aantay sa asawa!*), the women laughed while they teased one another, making a satirical comment on their own economic dependence on male relatives—a situation that had been all too common yet also a point of disdain among such strong-willed Waray women. Whereas those who completed college degrees often migrated to Tacloban City or larger urban centers in neighboring islands, the women who remained in Palo usually earned multiple incomes from laundry work, 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 nipa palm leaves into sheets of thatched palm leaves (*pawud*) used for building huts and traditional roofing materials. Households that subsisted on fishing and labored in farmlands and coconut plantations as landless tenants often lived in huts by the coast, directly along rivers, streams, and swampier grounds. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2014), in a survey released a year before Yolanda, the poverty incidence for women in Region VIII had already been on a constant increase. A regional gender situationer, which the National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) published in 2013, similarly exemplified the vulnerabilities I witnessed and wrote of from my fieldwork post-Yolanda. Poor women often shouldered unpaid labor as farmers and fishers with little land tenure in addition to child rearing, household management, and community care work (NSCB 2013).

Kapitana Malvarosa, the captain of Barangay Cogon and a boisterous grandmother in her sixties told me how difficult it always had been to tell people to evacuate in the event of an intensifying storm. “Huuuuy! You should evacuate! You should evacuate! (*HUUUY! BAKWIT NA KAMO! BAKWIT NA KAMO!*)”, she often screamed her mightiest on a megaphone to help rile up her neighbors, especially her fellow women and pregnant mothers. People all across Palo agree that it has been their practice to evacuate to evacuation sites, the women first with their children and elderly. The men often stayed at home to look after the house, livestock, appliances, and other assets they worried of losing. The municipality has neither enough vehicles to transport people and their livestock to designated evacuation centers, nor adequate facilities certified as safe evacuation sites.

Nanay Lydia, another well-known elder in her fifties serving as a barangay health worker in Barangay Salvacion, told me how she used her Waray ferocity in rousing up her neighbors to safety. She jumped up from her chair to demonstrate, shouting: “Quick!!! Let’s be quick now!!! The winds are getting stronger!!!” (*DALI!!! DALI NA TAYO!!! LUMALAKAS NA YUNG HANGIN!!!*). Much to the hysteric laughter and entertainment of other women in the health clinic, Nanay Lydia (2015) proceeded 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 me as the meek Manileña they perceived me to be, she saw herself by contrast as the fierce Waray woman who could scream and rile up her village, her *kababayan-an* or cowomen to run to safety. Nanay Lydia (*ibid.*), however, made a crucial point that 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 (2015), an older grandmother sitting next to me. Nanay Lilia had to be tied to window grills in order to be saved when the floods gushed into the classroom where she and 200 others sought refuge. “Not all Waray are brave,” Nanay Lilia (*ibid.*) softly countered.

Far from an essentialized trait of a superhuman invincibility, the Waray women’s attitude of “brinkmanship,” I argue, may be understood as a strength of will that can be summoned by those who refuse to retreat from advancing dangers, a fierceness performed and put into action to resist the confinements of inevitable death. In what follows next, the Waray women’s survival narratives reveal the ways they make meaning of Yolanda as part of their lives in the Eastern Visayas.

Women of Storm Surges: Personifying the Storm

While we sat to share a meal one day, Lola Filea (2015), a retired public schoolteacher, recounted for us with a mix of great terror and pride how she survived the storm.

Si Yolanda parang may mga kamay! Naglalaro, pinaglalaruan kami.
Ang mga chandelier sa katedral, malalaking upuan, mabibigat na muwebles, pinaglaruan niya! Ang mga bubong inakyat niya! Tapos pag nangawit na siya, napagod, ibabagsak din niya lahat!

Yolanda [as if she] had hands! She was playing, playing 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 in midair 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. “She has a mind of her own” (*May sarili siyang isip*), as Ma’am Connie (2015) told me, a mother widowed by the disaster and a prominent community organizer for GABRIELA. No random unconsciousness could have caused the overwhelming death and destruction. She explained, “Is there such a wind that would chase you? She went after each one of us, one by one” (*Mayroon bang hangin na hinahabol ka? Inisa-isa niya kami*). 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 surmised. “Yolanda, too, had legs,” said Ma’am She (2015), a snack vendor in a school cafeteria. The floods one afternoon finally subsided and our feet in rubber slippers dried while we told stories by her stall. She recalled how she and her children ran for safety. “The waters chased us up the house!” (*Hinahabol kami ng tubig pataas ng bahay!*), she exclaimed in tears (*ibid.*).

“Si Yolanda”—by pointing to Yolanda with the particle *si*, survivors referred 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 alluded to the storm—“Si Yolanda”—like a relative, the neighbor, someone too close by and hence unforgettable. The Filipino language uses gender-neutral pronouns but differentiates acting sentient beings from inanimate objects. The Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAG-ASA) names tropical cyclones that enter the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR) through its unique scheme of choosing local nicknames in alphabetical order to identify typhoons. The local and international names given to the storm signify not only different meteorological classifications, but also two different discursive narratives about the typhoon: Typhoon Haiyan embeds the Philippines in international debates on global warming and the climate crisis, while Typhoon Yolanda reflects the lived-through local experiences



Fig. 1. Neil Doloricon's *Bagyong Yolanda*, woodcut, 2013; photo courtesy of the artist

of vulnerability, disorientation, identity, power, and divine provenance (Bankoff and Borrinaga 2016). In the context of the feminine name Yolanda, the particle “si” and its corresponding gender-neutral pronoun “siya” translate as “she” in the English language. Aided by PAG-ASA’s naming convention, survivors refer to Yolanda’s storm surges and wind speeds of 300 kilometers per hour as a person. She is a relation, a sentient being with arms and legs, who howls and screams, perhaps with a face too, as Neil Doloricon personifies on a haunting woodcut he carved a week into the aftermath (fig. 1).

“*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 of which symbolic identification could make sense. 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 to explain 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 to the storm by identifying with her, and her with them.

In a somewhat comical reverse of Yolanda’s wrath, survivors narrated their ecstasy when Pope Francis came to visit them. Another storm of signal number 2, named Amang, blew strong winds and rains.² The crowds were all rain-drenched from head to foot in flimsy yellow raincoats. They screamed and waved when the pope, also soaked by the heavy downpour, drove down their town’s small paved road. The women’s eyes twinkled with tears as we stood huddled together as recounts of the papal visit circulated. Their excitement sent goose bumps rippling all around us, me included. Wide-eyed and half-screaming they reported to me, “NO ONE cared that Amang was growing stronger!” Absolutely every single person was out in the streets, the elderly, babies, the sick. With a palm up facing outward, they commanded the storm: “Amang, you stay put where you are! The Pope is already here!” (*Diyan ka lang Amang! Nandito na si Pope!*). In an uncanny similarity with the biblical reading from the Gospel of Mark 4:35–51, “*Ginpahugpoy ni*



Fig. 2. Willy Layug's *Our Lady of Hope* statue at the papal mass, 17 Jan. 2015, Tacloban City, Leyte; photo (by Benhur Arcayan) courtesy of Willy Layug

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

Inside Palo's Metropolitan Cathedral of Our Lord's Transfiguration stands a seven-foot statue named “Our Lady of Hope” carved by Willy Layug in time for the papal mass in Tacloban City (fig. 2). Her skin is brown, and she is clad in a *barot saya*, the traditional blouse and skirt worn by Tagalog and Visayan women, with a black veil over her long dark hair. Many women elders today enter the Palo Cathedral to pray still veiled in lace; this conservatism reminding me that the Visayas had been the first and oldest site of Christian proselytization waged in the country. The Lady is not tattooed. Despite the lilac and pink floral patterns on her skirt, the Virgin Mary's face mourns a sorrow as great as that mirrored in the faces of those 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 (*nagsisigawsi* Yolanda), Lola Penyang (2015), a short and spindly old woman in her seventies, reenacts 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 rebuilt on the same spot over a year after. As a good host she apologized for not having any seat to offer me and told me to stand in the shade at least; while she faced the noontime heat, her wrinkled skin browned with generations of work under the sun, she wiped a rag through both sweat and tears for a life seemingly unchanged for generations. Melay, too, a feisty overseas Filipina worker in her late twenties who returned from Singapore pregnant proudly recounted how an international medical team attended to her needs during Yolanda's aftermath. “A white midwife!” she bragged to the envy of her other female friends, local women who hardly availed of reproductive healthcare in their own municipal clinic; they asked me, too, how they could apply to work as caregivers in Canada, if I had any information to share. Melay (2015) proudly introduced Claire, her baby seated on her lap, who Melay said clung mightily inside her uterus despite threats of a miscarriage—“She's brave like a true Waray!” her mother exclaimed—as Yolanda shook mother and child. Melay was preparing to leave soon to begin earning in dollars again, saying she refused to sit around all day waiting for coins from older brothers. When Yolanda simply marked the continuation of the same gendered vulnerabilities and the provision of previously unavailable basic services, the super typhoon indeed became “si Yolanda”: one called with an almost fond familiarity, a not 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 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 toward what they call “being bad” and the domination of male aggression in society, survivors quickly associated the hurricane with the reputation of a “rampaging Wildman” (Barker and Miller 1990, 112–13) who “raged and howled” and was “badder dan all

of dem [other typhoons]” (ibid., 114). In a similar vein Central Javanese peoples attributed anthropomorphic causes to their frequent experiences of disasters. The powerful earthquake of 2006 that killed 6,000 in Yogyakarta was accompanied with threats of Mount Merapi’s eruption and subsequently followed by a tsunami only two months after. Many residents of Java identified Ratu Kidul, the Goddess of the Ocean, as responsible for these tragedies—“a goddess of elusive presence,” one who could not be seen but who controlled the sea and land, a savior and a destroyer, and whose discontent with people’s behavior was manifested in disasters (Friend 2006).

Bankoff (2004, 94–95) 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.” Hoffman (2002, 113) similarly argues that metaphors “reflect the mental processes of a collective people and the fruits of both creative impulse and sense-making reasoning.” Whether personifying disasters is seen as “cultural resilience,” a “psychological prop” for social repair (Barker and 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 ultimately reclaim 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 that reveals a relational understanding of powerful waters and winds. The women’s stories reveal a storm that is a conscious force—one perhaps similar to the survivors in ferocity but that destroys them too. The women recognize a storm that occurs in a day but which also repeatedly happens on their own bodies and communities. Their stories evoke a cultural trauma that Waray women’s collective experiences of poverty, dispossession, and gendered violence understand.

Safety and Order in Seasons and Cycles

Kapitana Malvarosa (2015) explains that the difficulty in getting people to act on a forthcoming disaster lies in their inability to perceive danger. The folk have understood the forces of wind and water in their seasonal visits as all too familiar. Everyone in Palo told me, “we are very used to the floods!” (*sanay na kami sa baha!*). Attesting to this perennial exposure to floods is the municipality’s very own Schistosomiasis Hospital, which attends specifically to local residents who are all known to suffer from some degree of “snail fever,” an infection caused by parasites found in floodwaters. Despite the

lamentable lack of many other basic social services, the monumental hospital housed in an unmistakable yellow building testifies to the regular threat of floodwaters. “Everyone here has schisto!” (*Na-schisto adto tanan!*) Such is the chronic crisis in Palo. It is also no surprise for a town built on 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 nonstop rains lasting for at least three to five consecutive days prompt men to begin to monitor the rise of the rivers. The village watchmen (barangay *tanod*) or security officers, usually men who volunteer to assist the barangay captain in frontline response to community concerns, have their radios and cellular phones on hand to coordinate with neighbors. Women are often responsible for preparing the children and supplies, and they get ready for instructions to stay or leave.

Yolanda survivors associated the unprecedented scale of the strongest storm in recorded history with another “Yolanda” occurring a century earlier. With the reference to cycles, *siglo* (centuries) or ages, I learned from the elders’ testimonies: “Every 100 years there is a deluge” (*Bawat 100 taon, may delubyo*). This great deluge was prophesized and therefore due to arrive, they insisted, and another would return a century later according to their oral traditions. The women said that the delubyo of a hundred years before was especially mighty, causing coconut fruits to fly like bowling balls across the skies, wrecking people’s homes and the *poblacion*, or the town plaza, for centuries the seat of state and church power. Sitting on wooden benches outside a sari-sari store, two grandmothers and three young mothers cradling their toddlers began to think about 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! Nataklob! Natabunan! Nawaray!

And this is why we call the place Tacloban because Tacloban had been covered! They say it was completely buried! Covered! Buried! Disappeared!

The women’s collective memory indeed matched historical records of a strong typhoon in the year 1897, dating 116 years prior to Yolanda, which brought storm surges upon Tacloban. Fr. José Algué S.J. (1898), who

served as the director of the Observatorio de Manila, reported this typhoon in Spanish as “El Baguio de Samar y Leyte” (The Typhoon of Samar and Leyte). Learning from these women’s stories, I argue that the “eternal cycle cosmologies,” which Hoffman (2002, 130) wrote about in her ethnographic work, do not simply allude to cyclical metaphors that survivors construct to make sense of a violent disruption, but also point to a real ontology that the women’s stories explain.

Cycles may be expressed by disaster survivors from various cultural contexts not only in temporal seasons, but also in the ways ethical relations move in spirals. An ethnography on the island of Naeaegama in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami offered a compelling discussion of survivors incorporating both moral and geophysical explanations for tsunami deaths, which they explained through “karmic justice,” referencing the ecological impact of the fisheries industry and the mining of coral reefs as part of their karma (Gamburd 2014). Similarly, the Central Javanese attributed their suffering to the eruption of Mount Merapi, an earthquake, and a tsunami that all happened in 2006, also as a consequence of their own violations of a code of conduct with the natural world. Heated public debates among Jakarta’s residents in the immediate aftermath pointed out their negligence in the performance of certain rituals to Ratu Kidul, the Goddess of the Ocean or the controversial construction of a shopping center on the sultan’s ancestral grounds (Friend 2006, 15). In a similar vein Waray women survivors were self-reflexive in their narratives of their own ethical transgressions relating to the environment as fisherfolk and those living near the rivers and subsisting directly from the natural environment. Apart from the towering debris of broken houses and property, women recalled the mounds of garbage that lay around their entire neighborhoods. All the plastic bags, diapers, and wrappers they threw out to sea came back in mounds of thick black mud with a rancid stench of decay—they pointed out that these were all brought from deep under the ocean bed, hurled up by the waves, and dumped inland with the storm surges. “When you throw garbage out into the river, the sea, it will be returned to you!” (*Kapag tinapon mo ang basura sa ilog, sa dagat, ibabalik sa ‘yo!*), many concluded. Similar to the concept of karma, the women also taught me the concept of *bulos*, which not only pertains to the violent gush of waters but is also defined by a karmic ferocity that attacks with a willful vengeance. The women now often speak about the greater need to manage proper waste disposal and resist throwing garbage out to sea.

Explaining disasters as a form of ecological retribution is not unique to Palo in the context of Yolanda. Found across indigenous paradigms are articulations of how human actions impacting the larger environment ultimately return to act upon communities in cyclical patterns. An elderly fisherman living in Mindoro Oriental who lost nine 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, 95). Survivors also blamed largely on illegal loggers the tragic flash flood that killed at least 5,000 in Ormoc City, Leyte, on the eve of 5 November 1991. 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 (2015), a bright, high-spirited leader in her mid-thirties, headed Barangay Cogon’s Women-Friendly Space, which was organized with the assistance of international development organizations and government agencies. She proudly shared with me their current initiatives in community organizing, which include involving women in hazard-mapping activities, trainings in disaster preparedness, and discussions of their livelihood concerns, among others. She lost thirteen in her family in the wake of Yolanda. Upon recalling the green that she said she began to see sprouting up on the brown barren hills weeks after the wreckage of the storm, she cried, moved by a sense that God still causes all things to grow once more. Many shared Ma’am Altea’s sentiments in finding reassurance in the continuation of life after death. In these cyclical ideologies a certain justice was served, a certain order restored.

Unfamiliar to Palo residents, however, were the delays in the monsoon season noticed in recent years, which have affected their farming and fishing calendars most directly. The El Niño heat was harsh from June to August 2015, the period I conducted fieldwork—a bizarre disruption in months of supposedly heavier rains, with which people nostalgically associated their fiesta parades. Despite the high risk of drowning for people living on a watershed, the regularity and frequency of their rivers and streams overflowing for generations have made floods a familiar occurrence. They are not considered a disaster in Palo. Similarly, at least six storms enter through the Pacific Ocean every year and make their way through the Eastern Visayas. These known patterns are familiar and not necessarily feared. Many know the forces of wind and water to take various forms: the ᜆᜃᜄ᜔ *buhawî* or cloudburst is like a tornado or a torrential downpour, as the elders described

In the wake of Yolanda's tragedy, many survivors were angered at the government's inability to translate the term "storm surge" into a vernacular term; they claimed that if only they understood what it meant, more would have run to safety. Kapitana Malvarosa of Barangay Cogon, where many of their men stayed at home and perished, exclaimed her frustration: "IF ONLY they told us it was a TIDAL WAVE, people would have been scared!" (*KUNG GINYANO la lugod pagsering nga TIDAL WAVE lugod, kay mahadlok an mga tawu!*) If the words "tsunami" or "tidal wave" were used, many attest, they would have evacuated (Bankoff and Borrinaga 2016, 57).

Syncretic Theologies of Justice

246

Nanay Celeste jumped up from her seat and dramatized how she clutched everyone around her tight as they squeezed into a tiny, cemented bathroom while Yolanda howled with rage 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. “HAAAIILL

MAAARYYY!!! HAAAIIL MAAARYYY!!!” Nanay Celeste screamed for us with her eyes shut, as loud as she did in praying with her family that day. Amidst our uncontrollable laughter watching her theatrical performance, I remembered many similar stories told to me of survivors who gripped 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 away to calm down. Bankoff (2004, 100) wrote that these similar accounts from the Ormoc flash flood or the Mount Pinatubo eruption, among many more disasters that have occurred 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 simply of physical forces, but also of unseen ones,” an animist cosmology that had incorporated the Christian God into itself. This cosmology was a clear manifestation of the indigenous paradigm among the Visayan people who considered themselves vastly outnumbered by the unseen, who personified natural forces, like celestial bodies or flowing waters, for worship, addressed the winds themselves with prayers for fair weather, and deemed it unwise to ignore supernatural signs (Scott 1994, 77–85). Yolanda was neither a velocity merely assigned with wind speeds in kilometers per hour, described by climate science, nor tracked down with meteorological equipment. Instead, “Si Yolanda” could be calmed down with prayers, was both an unprecedented rampage as well as a familiar ferocity that would make the same pathway every 100 years, and a terrifying 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, superstition, primitivity, and ignorant resignation. I argue that the women’s survival testimonies do not express a passive fatalism, but rather an embodied ferocity that is at the same time humbled by an acknowledgment of how small human beings are in a much larger cosmos. The women speak of human beings’ relationship to and dependence on such powerful forces rather than being separate from and dominating over creation. Hoffman (2002, 115) argues that disasters serve to combat the false divisions placed to separate “culture” and “nature,” exemplifying that all human endeavor 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,” subsuming culture, society, and environment altogether.

Waray women survivors understand that their small yet significant place in the cosmos lies at the mercy of catastrophic forces of wind and water, including the many forces of poverty and gendered violence.

The Waray often use the common expressions waray to say “nothing” or “there is none left” and *ambot* to say “I don’t know.” Virgilio Enriquez (1992), the founding scholar of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino* (Filipino Psychology), argues for a reinterpretation of such common Filipino expressions that have often been taught as negations by colonial education. For instance, one who encounters insurmountable difficulties often uses the common phrase in Filipino *bahala na* (“come what may”) to express a fatalistic sigh of resignation. This phrase, however, originally derives from “*Bathala na*,” which suggests a total surrender to the Creator, Bathala, who one believes will take care of everything. Borinaga (1992) also offers a complementary explanation to what colonial education has taught our collective memory to be an expression of dismal fatalism. He offers that *bahala* in Binisaya means the number 100 million, with “*bahala na*” translating as “I take one in a hundred million chance,” a phrase which expresses a reckless optimism that is both unbelievable and admirable. Cynthia Bautista (2000) writes of a similar observation in the context of the Mount Pinatubo eruption of 1992, during which residents of Concepcion in Tarlac Province engaged in “*bahala na*” as a kind of calculated risk taking that did not lack faith in prayer and divine intercession. In this argument, perhaps waray and *ambot* should also be reinterpreted not as ignorance but as humble acknowledgment of one’s inability to know everything, including theological mysteries.

Survivors often questioned their own moralizing explanations when they asked why “good” people died, why “bad” people received much relief aid, why “innocent” people suffered, why the “lazy” now had new television sets and new roofs when the “hardworking” still had so little. When Pope Francis visited Leyte on 17 January 2015 he was confronted with these very same mysteries that survivors have been asking. “Why do children suffer?,” a young girl survivor asked him, crying. The pope bowed his head, only offered silence and wept with a crowd of thousands in recognition of the ineffability of inexplicable insanity (*Mail Online* 2015). “For you, what is Yolanda? What brought us Yolanda?” (*Para sa imo, anot Yolanda? Kay ano umabot ha aton an Yolanda?*), I asked many women survivors. “I am not educated” (*Di ako maaram*), others would reply. Despite an ignorance measured by levels 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 . . . I do not know” (ay . . . ambot), women survivors articulated an overwhelming and simultaneously humbling recognition of what they did not understand. Yet, their claim to ignorance was also a claim to knowing something. “*Di ako maaram*”: after a humble confession of “the little they know” followed extensive laboring to expound on grounded theologies as probable explanations for their incomprehensible suffering.

Various women expressed an array of sentiments: “Did God want for the children to die? No, God did not want that” (*Gusto ba ng Diyos na mamatay ang mga bata? Hindi, hindi ginusto ng Diyos ‘yan*). “People have gone overboard with their wrongdoings” (*Sumusobra na ang mga tao*). “People are already forgetting about God” (*Nakakalimot na ang mga tao sa Diyos*). “There was a need to lessen our numbers because many have grown sinful” (*Kailangan na magbawas kasi marami na’ng makasalan*).

Nanay Nila, a grandmother and whose daughter is a single mother, was eager to tell me of the horrific ordeal that she and her family went through in order to survive. I remembered her strong arms, large hands combing her unruly hair as she got home from vending all day, her grin huge with missing teeth. Since she was a child she had been paddling in wooden boats whenever the river and its creeks overflowed, flooding her village during the annual monsoon season. She lamented the seventy-nine children and women evacuees who died in the school next to her house. “God replaced the people because our sins have been too great” (*Pinalitan ng Diyos ang mga tao kasi sobra na ang sala*. [Nanay Nila 2015]). The women strikingly evoked the concept of washing, cleansing, or purifying (*paghuhugas*) 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 to scrub clothes in big colored basins lying around the public pump wells, and how manual laundering for a living was by no means light work. Perhaps this was what washing their villages meant too, a great labor by cosmic and natural forces to destroy and transform their struggles.

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). As the Waray women survivors’ narratives demonstrate, those who were impacted by Yolanda challenged the fixed binary categories of “victims” who helplessly endured suffering and

“survivors” who actively struggled to overcome. They demonstrated how they could in turn appropriate these identities in an agentic manner—as women who were not only impacted by the violence of storm surges but also made of the very same ferocity—when they articulated, embodied, and performed what it meant to recover and survive.

Conclusion

Many of the Waray women I spoke with talked of having nothing left after Typhoon Yolanda struck. The violent storm surges had destroyed everything and taken away all that they had, just as poverty did. Waray women, like the watershed and coasts they lived in, had taken the brunt of storms, floods, and waves of colonial violence and state neglect. “Covered! Buried! Disappeared!” (Nataklob! Natabunan! Nawaray!) Yet, despite these apocalyptic forces that have ravaged their ecologies and communities, something remained. “This is who the Waray is. Nothing is left, but we still have something. Nothing is left, but we still have something” (Ganyan ang Waray. Wala na, pero meron pa rin. Wala na, pero meron pa rin).

Of the twelve women survivors who I formally interviewed and the many others I listened to and who invited me into their homes to join storytelling circles (*kuwentuhan*), less than a handful were official members of GABRIELA, and no one identified being engaged in some formal practice of political activism. With Palo as a site of many violent encounters, intensifying storms, perennial 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 ways enacted not only in daily but also in extraordinary circumstances. The Waray ferocity, rather than inner resiliency as defined by Western conception, is instead associated with action. It is never backing away from a fight, it is brinkmanship, it is a temper that cries out 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 labors for a better life as an overseas Filipina worker. It is a mother running fast with strong legs and strong arms carrying a child not her own. It is a woman offering to lull other women’s children to sleep, performing courage while her own fears pound terror through her chest. The Waray ferocity is not an essentialized trait of superhuman invincibility. Instead, like a living storm that howls, wails, and moves with swift arms and

legs, she is an agent who is able to do something in response to extraordinary forces such as Typhoon Yolanda. For women of storm surges, ferocity is a quality for action. It is an ancient refusal to die away.

Notes

This article is derived from my master's thesis, "Kababayen-An Han Karak-An (Women of Storm Surges): A Feminist Ethnographic Research on Women Survivors of Super Typhoon Yolanda" (Go 2016). I am grateful for the support and mentorship of my committee members from the University of British Columbia: Dr. Leonora Angeles, Dr. Pilar Riaño-Alcalá, and Dr. Natalie Clark. I am indebted to my relatives in Leyte who hosted me in their homes for three months of El Niño heat, for sharing their grief, fears, and dreams with me throughout their piyesta season. Without your trust, there would have been no work done. Damo nga salamat! This work is dedicated to my great grandmother Lola Teresa Novelo, my only bloodline to an ancient ferocity. Padayon! Permission granted by Neil Doloricon and Willy Layug to use photos of their respective art works is also gratefully acknowledged.

- 1 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, officers of GABRIELA, a nationwide network of grassroots organizations advocating women's issues in the Philippines, shared with me that the MSWDO of Palo has been overwhelmed by reported cases of domestic abuse, among others; GABRIELA in Palo has been working to partially assist the MSWDO and her team.
- 2 The Philippine Atmospheric Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration (PAG-ASA) categorizes storms according to wind speeds. A Signal No. 2 storm has wind speeds of 61 to 120 kilometers per hour sustained within the next 24 hours. Localities placed under public storm signal number 2 experience such winds strong enough to tilt coconut trees, uproot a few big trees, unroof a large number of houses made of light materials, and the like (*Official Gazette* n.d.).
- 3 The *baybayin* script is a 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, among other pre-Hispanic writing systems, is a legacy of colonial erasures. I insert the script in this text to signal an indigenous ecological knowledge, a gesture in marking a different ontology. The standard I write with here is based on the *Doctrina Christiana* convention. Although this system denotes the Tagalog syllabary, baybayin scholars including Borrinaga refer to this convention for decoding scripts or *Surat Binisaya* on Visayan artifacts such as the Limasawa Pot found in Southern Leyte.
- 4 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 that the devotee endures in everyday life, but masks everyday agentic acts that transform the violence evoked by the wrathful words of *karak-an* and *karat-an*.
- 5 Still debated among local historians is whether the first mass of 1521 was held in Limasawa Island located at the southernmost tip of Leyte island, or Masao, a place in Butuan City.

Nevertheless, it is highly significant that on the same year, the Spanish colonizers officially settled the town of Palo, Leyte (Borrinaga and Kobak 2006).

References

- Algué, José. 1898. El Baguio de Samar y Leyte: 12–13 Octubre de 1897. University of Santo Tomas Miguel de Benavides Library. Online, <http://digitallibrary.ust.edu.ph/cdm/ref/collection/section5/id/220321>, accessed 22 Apr. 2017.
- Ate Marielle. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. San Miguel, Palo Municipality, Leyte, June.
- Bankoff, Greg. 2003. *Cultures of disaster: Society and natural hazard in the Philippines*. New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
- . 2004. In the eye of the storm: The social construction of the forces of nature and the climatic and seismic construction of God in the Philippines. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 35(1): 99–111.
- Bankoff, Greg and George Emmanuel Borrinaga. 2016. Whethering the storm: The twin natures of Typhoons Haiyan and Yolanda. In *Contextualizing disaster*, ed. Gregory V. Button and Mark Schuller, 44–65. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Barker, David and David Miller. 1990. Hurricane Gilbert: Anthropomorphizing a natural disaster. *Area* 22(2): 107–16.
- Bautista, Ma. Cynthia Rose B. 1993. *In the shadow of the lingering Mt. Pinatubo*. Quezon City: College of Social Sciences and Philosophy Publications, University of the Philippines.
- . 2000. Social constructions of the Mt. Pinatubo disaster: Preliminary insights into the culture and politics of disaster in the Philippines. Paper presented at the Wageningen University and Research Centre, 21 Nov.
- Borrinaga, Rolando. 1992. Ethnic words are not trivial. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 10 Nov.: 5.
- . 2003. Waray-Waray defended. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 29 Nov.: A21.
- . 2014. "Karak-an" is appropriate word. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 26 Jan. Online, <http://opinion.inquirer.net/70281/karak-an-is-appropriate-word>, accessed 31 Jan. 2016.
- . 2015a. Revisiting Visayan culture and identity in Eastern Visayas. Paper presented at a symposium on "History as a Tool in Understanding Waray Culture and Identity" held at the Samar State University, Catbalogan, Samar, 27 Feb.
- . 2015b. Supertyphoon Yolanda (Haiyan): The new milestone of our lives. *Journal of History* 61:236–61.
- Borrinaga, Rolando O. and Cantius J. Kobak. 2006. *The colonial odyssey of Leyte (1521–1914): A translation of Reseña de la provincia de Leyte por Manuel Artigas y Cuerva*. Quezon City: New Day.
- Burns, Lucy. 2016. Eartha Kitt's "Waray Waray": The Filipina in black feminist performance imaginary. In *Filipino studies: Palimpsests of nation and diaspora*, ed. Martin F. Manalansan IV and Augusto Espiritu, 313–32. New York: New York University Press.
- Demetriades, J. and E. Esplen. 2008. The gender dimensions of poverty and climate adaptation. *IDS Bulletin* 39(4): 24–31.

- Doloricon, Neil. 2013. *Bagyong Yolanda*. Woodcut. 15.5 x 36 in.
- Enarson, Elaine. 1998. Through women's eyes: A gendered research agenda for disaster social change. *Disasters* 22(2): 157–73.
- . 2000. We will make meaning out of this: Women's cultural responses to the Red River Valley flood. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 18(1): 39–62.
- Enarson, Elaine and Betty Hearn Morrow. 1997. A gendered perspective: The voices of women. In *Hurricane Andrew: Ethnicity, gender and the sociology of disasters*, ed. Walter Gillis Peacock, Betty Hearn Morrow, and Hugh Gladwin, 116–40. London: Routledge.
- . 1998. *The gendered terrain of disasters: Through women's eyes*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Enarson, Elaine and P. G. Dhar Chakrabarti, eds. 2009. *Women, gender and disaster: Global issues and initiatives*. New Delhi: SAGE.
- Enriquez, Virgilio G. 1992. *From colonial to liberation psychology: The Philippine experience*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.
- Fordham, Maureen. 2012. Gender, sexuality and disaster. In *The Routledge handbook of hazards and disaster risk reduction*, ed. Ben Wisner, JC Gaillard, and Ilan Kelman, 424–35. New York: Routledge.
- Friend, Maria. 2006. Kanjeng Ratu Kidul, the elusive goddess of Java. *TAASA Review* 15(4): 14–15.
- Gamburd, Michele Ruth. 2014. *The golden wave: Culture and politics after Sri Lanka's tsunami disaster*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Go, Chaya Ocampo. 2016. Kababayen-an Han Karak-an (Women of Storm Surges): A feminist ethnographic research of Waray Women survivors of super typhoon Yolanda. *UBC Open Library*. Online, <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0228624>, accessed 20 Mar. 2017.
- Hewitt, Kenneth. 2012. Culture, hazard and disaster. In *The Routledge handbook of hazards and disaster risk reduction*, ed. Ben Wisner, JC Gaillard, and Ilan Kelman, 85–96. New York: Routledge.
- Hoffman, Susanna M. 2002. The monster and the mother: The symbolism of disaster. In *Catastrophe and culture: The anthropology of disaster*, ed. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman, 113–41. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- IBON Foundation. 2015. *Disaster upon disaster: Lessons beyond Yolanda*. Quezon City: IBON Foundation.
- Kapitana Malvarosa. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Cogon, Palo Municipality, Leyte, Aug.
- Katkat. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. San Miguel, Palo Municipality, Leyte, June.
- Lola Fe. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. San Miguel, Palo Municipality, Leyte, June.
- Lola Filea. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. San Miguel, Palo Municipality, Leyte, June.
- Lola Nilda. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Salvacion, Palo Municipality, Leyte, July.
- Lola Penyang. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Salvacion, Palo Municipality, Leyte, July.
- Ma'am Altea. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Cogon, Palo Municipality, Leyte, Aug.
- Ma'am Connie. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Cogon, Palo Municipality, Leyte, Aug.
- Ma'am Daday. 2015. Interview by the author. Bgy. San Miguel, Palo Municipality, Leyte, June.
- Ma'am She. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. San Miguel, Palo Municipality, Leyte, June.
- Mail Online*. 2015. And the heavens opened! Pope Francis takes shelter under a poncho during trip to typhoon-hit Philippines but fresh storms force him to abandon his visit early. Online, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2914365/Pope-Francis-takes-shelter-poncho-trip-typhoon-hit-Philippines-fresh-storms-force-abandon-visit-early.html>, accessed 22 Apr. 2017.
- Melay. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Salvacion, Palo Municipality, Leyte, July.
- Nanay Celeste. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. San Miguel, Palo Municipality, Leyte, June.
- Nanay Lilia. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Salvacion, Palo Municipality, Leyte, July.
- Nanay Lydia. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Salvacion, Palo Municipality, Leyte, July.
- Nanay Nila. 2015. Interview by the author, Bgy. Salvacion, Palo Municipality, Leyte, July.
- National Statistics Coordination Board (NSCB). 2013. *Regional gender situationer Eastern Visayas 2013*. Manila: NSCB.
- Neumayer, E. and T. Plümper. 2007. The gendered nature of natural disasters: The impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981–2002. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 97(3): 551–66.
- Official Gazette*. [n.d.] The Philippine public storm warning signals. Online, <http://www.gov.ph/laginghanda/the-philippine-public-storm-warning-signals/>, accessed 12 May 2017.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony. 1996. Anthropological research on hazards and disasters. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25:303–28.
- Oliver-Smith, Anthony and Susanna M. Hoffman. 1999. *The angry earth: Disaster in anthropological perspective*. New York: Routledge.
- . 2002. Why anthropologists should study disasters. In *Catastrophe and culture: The anthropology of disaster*, ed. Anthony Oliver-Smith and Susanna Hoffman, 3–22. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Oxfam International. 2005. The tsunami's impact on women. Oxfam briefing note. Online, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/the-tsunamis-impact-on-women-115038>, accessed 11 May 2017.
- Oxfam Philippines. 2014. *Women after the storm: Gender issues in Yolanda recovery and rehabilitation*. Manila: Oxfam Philippines.
- Philippine Statistics Authority. 2014. 2012 Official poverty statistics for the basic sectors. *Republic of the Philippines: Philippine Statistics Authority*, 4 July. Online, <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/poverty/dataCharts.asp>, accessed 20 Mar. 2017.
- Scott, William Henry. 1994. *Barangay: Sixteenth-century Philippine culture and society*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Warren, James Francis. 2016. Typhoons and the inequalities of Philippine society and history. *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 64(3–4): 455–72.

Chaya Ocampo Go is a doctoral student, Department of Geography, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, N430 Ross Building, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M3J 1P3. A recipient of the Ontario Trillium Scholarship, she is a transnational

Filipina scholar dedicated to the themes of life and resurgence in ravaged ecologies-communities at the frontlines of the climate crisis. She trained as a cultural anthropologist and holds a Master of Arts in Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice from the University of British Columbia. Her work is focused on feminist analyses of disasters, including ecological and indigenous knowledges for survival in the Philippines. <chayago@yorku.ca>