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Martial Law as Philippine Trauma: Group Culture, the Sacred, and Impunity in Three Memoirs

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Martial Law as Philippine Trauma Group Culture, the Sacred, and Impunity in Three Memoirs

This article argues that Ferdinand Marcos's martial law regime can be labelled as traumatic based on studies that link the regime's practices with victims manifesting signs of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). An examination of martial law in the Philippines enriches cultural memory and trauma studies by supporting genres other than (post)modern fiction such as memoir-writing and poetry; by explaining the notion of *kapwa*, which considers group culture in processes of healing; by putting forward the value of the sacred rather than the Western secular way of "healing"; and, lastly, by underscoring that resolution remains questionable, especially in societies of impunity.

KEYWORDS: FERDINAND MARCOS • PTSD • MEMORY STUDIES • TRAUMA STUDIES • HOLOCAUST • FORGETTING

In an article entitled “Worse than Death,” published by Philippine online news source *Rappler*, the author enumerates, explains, and reminds the reader of all the different and “creative” torture methods used during Ferdinand Marcos’s martial law regime (Hapal 2016).¹ Although the hand-drawn illustrations only hint at the horrors, the litany of brutality is too much: electric shock, the “San Juanico Bridge,” serum injection, Russian roulette, beating, strangulation, the water cure, animal treatment, burning, pepper torture, not to mention psychological torment. Still, according to the same article, over 34,000 people were tortured under the Marcos administration.

One can imagine how the trauma from such direct and indirect infliction of pain can subsist until today. Survivors have testified: Felix Dalisay, now around 65 years old, was tortured and imprisoned (*Rappler* 2016); Doris Nuval, now 65 as well, was arrested; and writer Mila Aguilar, now 68, had to escape the underground (Enano 2017). Other women such as Cristina Rodriguez, Trinidad Herrera, and Carmencita Florentino number among those who currently undergo “re-traumatization” (Olea 2016). Exhortations to “move on”²—understood as “skipping” narration of the past—are not only insensitive but also misinformed (*Philippine Daily Inquirer* 2016).

In this article I argue that the martial law regime under Ferdinand Marcos can be labelled scientifically as traumatic because studies have established direct correlations between practices of the regime and the victims who manifest signs of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the canonical form of trauma. Creating this unequivocal link between martial law and PTSD allows us to compare martial law with other examples of validated PTSD-trigger events elsewhere. Consequently, this argument generates at least two main points. First, I address myself mainly but not exclusively to Filipinos: martial law was not just an “event” from which we should “move on”; it caused real trauma to real people. It destroyed lives, and thus justice must be done. Secondly—now, I speak more but not only to Western colleagues—ascertaining the traumatic status of martial law inscribes the era into other global trauma paradigms, hence widening the scope of cultural memory and trauma studies, which at present is too focused on Western-based models such as the Holocaust.

In particular I argue that an examination of martial law in the Philippines enriches cultural memory and trauma studies in at least four ways, aside from exploring another trauma model outside the usual Euro-US sphere:

by supporting genres such as memoir writing and poetry, rather than only (post)modern aesthetics; by explaining the notion of *kapwa* (roughly translated as “fellow human being”), which considers group culture, instead of an individual one; as regards coming-to-terms with the past, by putting forward the value of the sacred, contrary to a Western secular way of “healing”; and, lastly, by underscoring the fact that resolution remains questionable until today.

To lay the case coherently, the article proceeds as follows: first, it defines and describes trauma and PTSD; second, it draws mainly from Cristina “Tina” Montiel’s first-person narrative of martial law trauma as proof of a politically and systemically triggered trauma. Aside from Montiel’s, other memoirs examined are those of the Quimpo family and Karl Gaspar’s. Third, in claiming that cultural trauma studies has relied on Western models, the article contextualizes the origins and developments of the field to demonstrate that these studies have not yet adequately shed light on other paradigms from this part of the world. Bringing out the gaps in the literature will allow martial law to be considered alongside other “models”—such as, for example, the Holocaust and slavery—as “validly traumatic” “on [its] own terms, and in [its] own terms” (Craps 2013, 6). Such a reading is possible if this Filipino trauma is articulated through ethical empathy.

I wish to underscore that this analysis draws from cultural memory studies rather than from a discipline like psychology. From my perspective, what makes the testimonials of Montiel, Gaspar, and the Quimpos interesting to analyze is their reliance on narrativity and literature—poems and journal entries—in order to articulate trauma, work through the past, and express agency. Such means provide us a potent source not only of first-hand accounts of the atrocities of martial law but also of concrete examples of coming to terms with one’s past.

Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Although some people might nonchalantly use the word “trauma” to describe any subjectively difficult experience, the term has a scientific background. Originally coming from the Greek word *τραῦμα*, which refers to a wound (Luckhurst 2008, 2) or specifically a “wound of the mind” (Caruth 1996, 4), trauma, as in its first English usage in seventeenth-century medicine, indicates a body injury caused by an external agent (Luckhurst 2008, 2).

What distinguishes trauma from shock or phobia, for example, is what Sigmund Freud (1914), in his essay “Remembering, Repeating, Working-through,” has called *Nachträglichkeit*, which some translate as “afterwardness” or “belatedness.” Belatedness should be understood as a situation in which the effects of trauma still come after—even years after—the traumatic event, thereby impeding the linearity of one’s life, thus interrupting the subjective fluidity of one’s chronological sense of time. For example, whereas crossing the road might prove easy to anyone, someone who suffers from PTSD following a severe car accident a few years earlier might suddenly stop in his or her tracks, gripped by bouts of hypervigilance and sweating and needing an abnormally long pause before crossing the street. The concept of *Nachträglichkeit* is important for our present concern because it explains why effects of torture and trauma can still manifest years later.

It was only in the 1980s when trauma received a canonical psychiatric classification in the form of PTSD. For the first time, the American Psychiatric Association (2013) included PTSD in its diagnostic manual edition that indicated new illnesses. People suffering from PTSD usually have escaped death, serious injuries, wars, disasters, accidents, or other extreme stressor events (Luckhurst 2008, 1). In his volume *The Trauma Question*, Roger Luckhurst (ibid.) describes the characteristics of trauma as follows:

Intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams . . . situations that repeat or echo the original. . . . Emotional numbing [or even] total absence of recall of the significant event . . . loss of temper control, hypervigilance or exaggerated startle response. Symptoms can come on acutely, persist chronically, or . . . appear belatedly, months or years after the precipitating event.

To this list, Irene Visser (2011, 270) adds depression, cynicism, and, at the same time, total absence of recall. Hence, Cathy Caruth (1996, 7) describes individuals suffering from trauma as caught in an oscillation between a crisis of death and a crisis of life.

In 1992 Judith Herman coined the term complex posttraumatic stress disorder to include prolonged and repeated trauma. What may be counted in this category, for instance, is a history of subjection to totalitarian control over months or years. This history might be the case for “hostages, prisoners of war, concentration camp survivors, and survivors of some religious cults”

(Herman 1992, 121). Examples also include “those subjected to totalitarian systems in sexual and domestic life, including survivors of domestic battering, childhood physical or sexual abuse, and organized sexual exploitation” (ibid.). According to Herman (ibid., 122), the advantage of naming this new category “represents an essential step toward granting those who have endured prolonged exploitation a measure of the recognition they deserve.” Further, “[i]t is an attempt to find a language that is at once faithful to the traditions of accurate psychological observation and to the moral demands of traumatized people” (ibid.).

In the fifth edition of its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5), the American Psychiatric Association (APA 2013) clarifies the diagnostic criteria for PTSD by including it under trauma- and stressor-related disorders of DSM-5. Here, the APA presents a sharper diagnosis of PTSD through a series of criteria from A to H. For example, in order to be said to fulfill criterion A, the person should have been exposed to “death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence” (ibid.) in at least one of these ways: “direct exposure; witnessing the trauma; learning that a relative or close friend was exposed to a trauma; indirect exposure to aversive details of the trauma, usually in the course of professional duties,” which might be the case for first-aid responders or doctors (ibid.). One who falls under criterion B, which examines how the traumatic event is insistently reexperienced, must exhibit one of these symptoms in order to establish PTSD: “unwanted upsetting memories, nightmares, flashbacks, emotional distress after exposure to traumatic reminders, physical reactivity after exposure to traumatic reminders” (ibid.). In order to justify the patient’s avoidance of trauma-related stimuli, according to criterion C, he or she should have experienced one of these: “trauma-related thoughts or feelings and trauma-related reminders” (ibid.). Fulfilling criterion D requires two symptoms: “inability to recall key features of the trauma; overly negative thoughts and assumptions about oneself or the world; exaggerated blame of self or others for causing the trauma; negative affect; decreased interest in activities; feeling isolated; difficulty experiencing positive affect” (ibid.). Likewise, criterion E, which concerns itself with posttrauma-related arousal and reactivity, also necessitates two characteristics as follows: “irritability or aggression; risky or destructive behaviour; hypervigilance, heightened startle reaction; difficulty concentrating; difficulty sleeping” (ibid.). The last three criteria, F, G, and H, call for the following features so as to validate the

symptoms: they last more than a month; they create “distress or functional impairment (e.g., social, occupational)” and, lastly, the symptoms “are not due to medication, substance use, or other illness” (ibid.).

Last but not least, PTSD under *DSM-5* includes specifications of dissociation, which entails an individual’s experience of either depersonalization or derealization. Depersonalization occasions “an experience of being an outside observer of or detached from oneself (e.g., feeling as if ‘this is not happening to me’ or one were in a dream)” while derealization involves an “experience of unreality, distance, or distortion (e.g., ‘things are not real’)” (ibid.). These physical manifestations of PTSD are important for the reading of the narratives to be discussed in this article, in particular, Montiel’s.

Traumatized patients, with the help of a professional, should ideally “work-through” his or her blocked memory that has been repressed because of trauma. Working-through, an appropriate translation of Freud’s *durcharbeiten*, could simply signify a “healing” or, better, a coming-to-terms with the past. The original German term for work, *Arbeit*, underscores the effort that is required in therapy. In Freud’s (1914, 152) description of treatment, the effort of work comes from both doctor and patient: while the patient must “find the *courage* to direct his attention to the phenomena of his illness,”³ the analyst or doctor should be forbearing in uncovering the resistance and in acquainting the patient with it. To clarify further what working-through entails, Dominick LaCapra (2001, 143–44) describes this process in the following manner:

In working-through, the person tries to gain critical distance on a problem and to distinguish between past, present, and future . . . this means, the ability to say to oneself: “yes, that happened to me back then. It was distressing, overwhelming, perhaps I can’t entirely disengage myself from it, but I’m existing here and now, and this is different from back then” . . . Working-through does not mean avoidance, harmonization, simply forgetting the past . . . it means coming to terms with the trauma, including its details.

LaCapra (ibid., 145) warns of an oversimplification of total closure, recovery, or full mastery of self. Hence, it is more prudent to talk about a “coming to terms” with one’s past, rather than, say, a “healing” of

trauma. Montiel (2015, 209) cites Becker et al. (1990, 144) to assert that a significant part of trauma healing among activists entails “accepting the fact that parts of the self and its world have been destroyed.” Indeed, Montiel’s article actually emulates working-through, almost exemplifying LaCapra’s description above.

Trauma Narratives of Martial Law

In the abstract of her article, entitled “Multilayered Trauma during Democratic Transition: A Woman’s First-Person Narrative,”⁴ Montiel (2015, 197) writes that her work is a “first-person narrative about [her] journey through more than 40 years of political trauma and recovery.” This article is particularly interesting for the present study because it offers (1) a personal traumatic narrative from a political activist who is also (2) a psychologist whose traumatic narrative establishes (3) a direct link with martial law. Furthermore, her essay has been published and thus dispenses with probable questions related to disclosure.

For similar reasons except for the second one above, I also refer to Susan and Nathan Quimpo’s (2012) *Subversive Lives* and Karl Gaspar’s (1985) *How Long? Prison Reflections of Karl Gaspar*. Written only in 2012, twenty-two years after the removal of Marcos, *Subversive Lives* is a robust 460-page memoir of the nine Quimpo siblings. Divided into five parts, the volume starts with the education of the children and their early activism, leading to their full-fledged political action against Marcos, resulting in the deaths of the authors’ brothers Jan and Jun; up to the aftermath of the Marcos regime. Like Montiel’s piece, the memoir is an exercise in *anamnesis*⁵ without, however, an analysis of their trauma, at least, not consciously. Unlike the two other works, Gaspar’s *How Long?* is not an anamnesis and not directly authored by him. Edited by Graham and Noonan in 1984, it is rather a collection of Gaspar’s letters and poems during his incarceration from 1983 to 1985. Thus, what is common in the three primary sources under examination here is that the protagonists have all been martial law activists.⁶ Even as this analysis refers to the three texts, priority is given to Montiel’s account because of its clear relation to PTSD.

Since Montiel (2015) has auto-analyzed her account, in a sense, it is unnecessary that I unpack her essay anew. As she states: “My article is one prodemocracy activist’s trauma and recovery story. This is my story, up close and personal. I am the storyteller and I am also the subject, not the object,

of this politico-psychological description and analysis” (ibid., 198). The fact that Montiel herself has written and published this testimonial establishes her, not me, as the agent of her own experience. Likewise, through writing, Gaspar and the Quimpos reclaim agency. My intention, therefore, as much as possible, is not to speak *for* them, but rather *with* them. I would like to see my role here as an empathetic unsettled⁷ *re-reader* trying to highlight the importance of their testimony.

A re-lecture of Tina Montiel’s analytic autoethnography merits attention because it establishes the link between martial law and the scientific state of trauma, PTSD. Consequently, this link allows one to situate Marcosian dictatorship in the Philippines as a specific psychopolitical trauma paradigm that translates a Filipino experience which, in turn, is relevant for cultural memory and trauma studies that I elaborate on in another section. I regroup her testimony and analysis into three phases: the development of her trauma; the belated characteristic of trauma ensuing years even after the martial law era; and, lastly, her process of working-through by means of narration, images, and community.

Montiel’s text describes her husband’s incarceration in 1972 and his being subjected to, yet surviving, the Russian roulette treatment. Released and then put back in prison, he began operating underground. By 1976, with a child to protect, she suffered extreme guilt because of her inability to join the underground movement. The reason behind this difficulty, according to LaCapra (2001, 144), lies in “the ability to undertake it in a manner that is not tantamount to betraying the trust or love that binds one to lost others—that does not imply simply forgetting the dead or being swept away by current preoccupations.” Although they were able to escape to Mindanao in the 1980s, mother and child continued evading agents who subsequently traced their whereabouts. Only once was she and her son allowed to visit her imprisoned husband, who was released in 1986, the year of the People Power Revolution.

Someone who definitely suffered imprisonment was Karl Gaspar. Abducted on 26 March 1983, Gaspar (1985, 2–3) was blindfolded, handcuffed, and brought to a “safe house.” More than two weeks after his disappearance, the military finally decided to divulge his whereabouts (ibid., 7). Although, fortunately, he was never physically tortured, Gaspar (ibid., 73) was surrounded by the reality of it: “Torture is inflicted on practically everyone arrested so that after a while one becomes numb. . . . Name any

torture technique, from the electric shock treatment to the water cure, and chances are it has been used on a detainee here. The setting ranges from a local outpost to an isolated safehouse.” However, in an entry dated 9 April 1983, Gaspar (ibid., 9) wrote: “Mental torture is another form [of extracting information], and in my case this was done through solitary confinement. I was in this very small room. It had no window. The sunshine came through the next room which was a public toilet.”

Torture is even more explicit in *Subversive Lives*. Transported to Camp Crame during the martial law era, Jan narrated:

They tortured us for hours. I was stripped naked and tied to a chair. Before starting to interrogate me, they put a very bright lamp . . . very close to my face . . . it was so agonizingly hot . . . I kept screaming in pain, begging them to switch it off. They didn’t. . . . They wrapped an electric wire around my penis and switched on the current. I shook all over. (Quimpo and Quimpo 2012, 159–60)

Jan’s brother Nathan was also beaten, electrocuted, and severely interrogated for at least six hours (ibid., 231–36). Sadly, the Quimpo family lost two sons, Jun and Jan, the latter remaining a *desaparecido*.

Although not directly tortured physically, Montiel lived years of psychological torment that would later bear *nachträglich* consequences. For the next fourteen years after martial law, Montiel would be afflicted with hypervigilance, guilt owing to her intellectual status, repressed emotions even after the 1986 revolution, and stress because of internal rifts in her organization. Amid all these difficulties, however, one cannot but be amazed at her completion of a PhD degree, her organization of strikes, and her success in raising her son almost without the help of a husband.

Her piece gives us evidence of trauma years after the martial law era. In 1989 she sought counselling. However, she notes that “[d]uring [her] first session, I just sat in front of my counsellor and did not say a word for around 45 minutes” (Montiel 2015, 205). By the 1990s, Montiel (ibid., 197) experienced what she describes as “bouts of uncontrollable weeping and vomiting”; difficulty in breathing, high-pressure, rapid-heart palpitations, nightmares, exaggerated startle response, cumulating to the end of her marriage. She also “became very angry and fought with almost all of [her] colleagues” (ibid., 205). As mentioned earlier in this

article, such symptoms constitute characteristics of posttraumatic stress disorder.

Although her “intellectual life began to take more vitality” sometime around 1995, she relapsed into “mental exhaustion, frightening night dreams, elevated blood pressure, uncontrollable vomiting and bleeding gastritis” (ibid., 206–7). All these symptoms happened after 1998, which signified the belated indications of PTSD. Furthermore, the content of her dreams—those that occurred in 1999, 2001, 2008, and 2009—clearly established the link between trauma and the martial law regime. Again, the nightmares were about her “abandonment” of comrades, whose traces of torture are evident; the constant worry for children; the presence of intruders and military men; bomb threats; and guilt over her status as an intellectual. Montiel (ibid., 206) would describe her dreams as of the kind “that woke me up at night, and found me sweating with heart palpitations.” The dreams reflected “the emotional life [she] bore during the martial law era that *had ended more than a decade* before [her] dreams occurred” (ibid., italics added). All these examples of “afterwardness” remind us not only of *Nachträglichkeit* but also of criteria which ascertain trauma found under *DSM-5*. Even in her postscript she admits, “I still struggle with panic attacks when stresses arise. In February 2014, I was hospitalized for continuous vomiting” (ibid., 208), thus testifying to prolonged and repeated bouts of traumatic symptoms.

Although scarce, evidences of trauma can perhaps be spotted in the Quimpo narrative. Gaspar’s narrative offers less clues of PTSD. The most obvious reason perhaps is that both stories attempted a retelling of the Marcos years instead of the aftermaths. However, one can read the following passage from the preface of *Subversive Lives*: “Not everyone found it easy, or desirable, to revisit the past . . . Lilian, who had migrated to Australia, told [Susan] that it was *difficult to recall* events in her past activist life. Since she had left the movement, she had mostly *wanted to forget*” (Quimpo and Quimpo 2012, xvii, italics added). In a few words, one discerns the irony between the difficulty of recalling as well as wanting to forget.⁸ There is a discrepancy between the inability and the unintentional. Anyhow, while I acknowledge the scarcity of compelling evidence of trauma from martial law, on the one hand, the *DSM-5* does confirm “unwanted upsetting memories” and “inability to recall,” which suggest trauma, on the other hand.

With regard to *How Long?* one has to look for another source outside it in order to ascertain Gaspar’s situation after martial law. An article published

by the International Centre for Transnational Justice (ICTJ 2017) sheds some light. Interviewed on reparation procedures for martial law victims, Gaspar remarks, among others: “I have also done a lot of emotional processing in the past, and have talked and wrote [sic] about my prison experiences, so I did not have to deal with the residue of trauma” (ibid.). Similar to Lilian’s statement above, there seems to be a discrepancy between having done “a lot of emotional processing”—does this allude to narration and therapy?—and not having to “deal with the residue of trauma.” Again, like *Subversive Lives, How Long?* does not aim to reflect on the aftermath of martial law, unlike Montiel’s piece. Hence, there is the probable lack of a more definitive evidence of PTSD.

At different times during the course of Montiel’s (2015, 209) narrative from 1972 to 2014, through narration and images, she reclaims agency again and again, even though “[r]ecovery is protracted, and often only partly achievable.” Indeed, according to LaCapra (2001, 145), “[e]ven in the case of severely traumatized victims, [one] may also find other tendencies in the self, including the ability to rebuild a life.” Montiel (2015, 207) herself found a capacity for reconstruction so that “as an aid to [her] personal meaning making, [she] began to write and publish.” While she sought help from different groups—healing interventions, retreats, psychological counselling, regular exercise—“one strength of analytic autoethnography lies in its ability to let persons embedded in political change claim their own voice, rather than allowing other writers to speak for them” (ibid., 199). She thus resorted to poetry, journal entries, and her published essay to make sense of trauma “because life stories mirror the culture in which the story is made or told” (McAdams 2001 cited in ibid.). Here, we find the links between traumatic narration, agency, and literature.

As regards *Subversive Lives*, although published only in 2012, the book was actually started in 1989, when Susan Quimpo began writing her memoirs. Unknown to her, her brother Nathan also embarked on a historical memoir project while he was in the Netherlands in the early 1990s. For different reasons, however, both of them set aside their writing. In 2005, historian Vicente Rafael encouraged Susan to put their chapters together. Soon, their siblings “were inspired to write” also, with Susan “taking on the considerable task of weaving the bits together into a coherent narrative” (Quimpo and Quimpo 2012, xvi). For some, like Emilie, reading the drafts of her siblings moved her to tears. Finally, the Quimpos expressed the hope

that their “family memories serve to commemorate a generation of *kasama* [comrades], who, out of unfettered love for the country and its people, gave all that they had” (ibid., xviii).

A first poem Montiel (2015, 204) composed in 1984, entitled “Wine on my Altar,” displays a persona harvesting her grapes “full of wrath,” which in the end blend in with references to the Eucharist. In the poem, rather than juxtaposing allusions to prison and anger, on the one hand—“wrath,” “barbed basket,” “prison wire,” “clenched fist,” “tortured fragments,” “dead comrades”—and spirituality, on the other hand—“altar,” “bread broken,” “offer,” “bless it,” and “chalice”—the persona combines both her pain and offering in the end, without dichotomizing one from the other:

I will offer
My wine full of wrath
Bless it drop by drop
In my own cup:
A crimsoned chalice
Painfully carved
By goodness starved

The wine is still “full of wrath,” yet it is offered; there is a chalice, yet it is “crimsoned”; it is carved, yet done “painfully.” Further, one may discern a development in the perspective of the speaker evolving from “I will harvest” to “I will press” to “I will wait” to “I will offer,” thus, a crescendo in trust and gift of self.

A second poem, this time in Filipino, “Uring Intelktwal” or “The Intellectual Class” (ibid.), written in 1991, expresses a persona being “torn apart by [her] two passions as a cadre and an intellectual” (ibid.). From a bridge, above a “dangerous current, muddy river,” exemplifying the liberation struggle, the academic waves to political friends, to “those yonder” on the other side. Montiel criticizes the intellectual’s distance from the messy battle, which is further emphasized by the poem’s ending that leaves one interrogating: “buhay o patay?” (“dead or alive?”), revealing the persona’s ambivalent state during perilous times.

A third and last poem, “An Afternoon Prayer,” was written in 1995 during a time of political transition after the Marcos era. The stanzas

reveal a persona accepting things that she can no longer control: At one time, “omnipotence was mine/ against the armored street” and “crowd microphones/ screamed out my righteous rage” (cf. ibid., 205). However, “Today I try to speak/ But mumble out of stage,” “There is no red I feel. . . . No bravery to flaunt . . . Accepting strength from Friends/ As color changes hue.” A peaceful resignation seemingly exudes from the poem, in contrast to the first two earlier compositions. Wrath dominates the first poem, which ends with an allusion to personal offering, which, however, is still colored “crimson.” The second poem certainly exhibits more liminality, uneasy double-consciousness with unresolved issues.

Like Montiel, Gaspar resorted to a lot to poetry writing during his lengthy incarceration. *How Long?* includes seven poems from his early abduction in March 1983 to the New Year of 1984. The first four short poems (Gaspar 1985, 2–7) were all composed during his first eight days as a detained man. These poems tell of his despair and loneliness (“Moments”), his interrogation by the officers (“None of Your Business”), his transfer from one prison to another (“Somewhere in Metro Manila”), and his disillusionment at not being released on Easter (“Holy Saturday Morning Blues”). Captured at the start of the Holy Week, Gaspar (ibid., xi), a “lay theologian and church worker, a poet, artist, dramatist, musician, and long-term human rights activist,” had hoped for his liberation on Easter Sunday or Monday. Similar to “Holy Saturday Morning Blues,” “Old Year/ New Year” (ibid., 119), written at the turn of 1983–1984, evokes the persona’s desire for hope which, however, is mingled with realistic skepticism. The last two poems are both about fellow detainees. “He is Just a Kid,” penned in May 1983, laments the imprisonment of a child (ibid., 16), while “Still Another Detainee Salvaged,” written in June 1983, views a fellow prisoner’s situation through spiritual lenses. This last poem, the longest one, can perhaps be said to represent Gaspar’s verses because it combines the incarceration experience and his allusions to Christianity, which characterize almost all his poems and letters. Here are some excerpts from “Still Another Detainee Salvaged”:

we heard he was padlocked
all by himself
in the *bartolina*⁹
on a sunday . . .

sunday and monday passed;
no relatives or lawyer came,
but he was finally surfaced
on the third day

he was brought out in the sun
a figure straight from *el greco*,
gaunt, thin, with soulful eyes,
half-dead, that tuesday

we embraced him with our eyes,
saw the wound on the forehead;
blood was still oozing out
then, they took him away. . . .

like lazarus he came out of the tomb,
but in the light, there wasn't
much promise of joy
for us, that tuesday. . . .

friday night, word came in a whisper:
he is no longer in prison
at 2:00 o'clock that afternoon
they had taken him to a place far away.

is he alive? or is he dead?
no one among us knows.
since he disappeared, we can't
do anything but pray.

Similar to Montiel's "Wine on my Altar," Gaspar's poem uses obvious allusions to Christ's Passion: the Sunday to Friday reference to the Holy Week; the famous crucified Christ-figure of painter El Greco; the wounded head suggesting Christ's; and the mention of Lazarus, who prefigured the Resurrection. However, much like "Holy Saturday Morning Blues," the poem's conclusion remains elusive of a definite redemption.

It is interesting to note that, during the traumatic events of the martial law era, Montiel and Gaspar resorted to writing poems in order to express themselves. Again, the verses were written in 1983 (Gaspar's), 1984, 1991, and 1995 (Montiel's). However, Montiel for her part would analyze the poems only later, as we see in her narrative dated 2015. For both, writing poems and journal notes helped articulate what could have defied immediate articulation.

In her book *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth (1996, 3), one of the founders of literature and trauma studies, explains the link between literature and psychoanalysis in the following terms:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet.

In other words, according to Caruth, literary language allows for the unnarratable to be narrated. When we listen to a trauma narrative, we listen to a voice that cannot fully know itself but which, nonetheless, bears witness (ibid., 9). When we read a trauma narrative, it "demands to be, yet, cannot be read" fully (Collins 2011, 6). In short, literature allows for "a language that defies *and* claims understanding" (Caruth 1996, 5).

At the same time, one also has to note that, during the Marcos era, freedom of expression was curtailed. Poetry, rather than, say, journalism, enabled writers to take advantage of metaphor and symbolism, which permitted indirect allusions to the political situation at hand. Such style also functioned as personal protection in case authorities uncovered the manuscript.

Like traumatic narratives, images reveal just as they conceal; they are opaque as they are transparent. In her essay Montiel incorporates the drawings her son Andoy made over the long period of his father's incarceration during martial law. Then four years old, Andoy "would live in the detention camp with other children of political detainees" (Montiel 2015, 201). Perhaps, the presence of other children ironically provided the child with a sort of play

therapy. Eventually, a graduate student of Montiel initiated a draw-and-tell activity with the boy, who sketched at least two figures (see *ibid.*, 202, 203). The first one shows destroyed homes, machine guns, and a car shattered by lightning. The second drawing portrays an animal in a cage, perhaps “depicting Andoy’s father in prison” (*ibid.*, 201). Clearly, Andoy’s artworks were produced within the specific situation and realm of play therapy, which was needed on account of his own father’s incarceration. The link, therefore, between the political turmoil and the drawings is strong.

The images’ importance is underscored when we see their function as traces, which, as Roland Barthes (1980) explores in *Camera Lucida*, indicate a “having been there” as opposed to just “was there,” with the former emphasizing the life lived. Although photos were the main object of Barthes’s discourse, the insight can be applied to the images Andoy drew. A trace can be likened to a translation or a sign of life after death (cf. Benjamin 1992), which enables the life of the subject to continue. Like trauma, the image-translation both claims and defies understanding; it allows an imperfect representation of an event; it evokes both presence and absence. Like traumatic narration, images assist the (non)representability of linear narration and words. Not only do they “assist,” for sometimes they are at least as important as the text itself. As such, Andoy’s sketches, instead of “mere illustrations,” should be read along with the text and the pieces of poetry as traces of trauma.

Thus far, mainly through Montiel’s piece, this article has tried to establish martial law as traumatic and show how texts and images defy and claim representation of trauma. The next section examines other trauma paradigms after which the features of martial law trauma for cultural memory and trauma studies are discussed.

Western Trauma Models and Ethical Challenges

Since its beginnings in the 1980s, the Holocaust has been, and perhaps still is, considered as the foundation and paradigm of trauma theory scholarship. In *Present Pasts*, Andreas Huyssen (2003, 99) describes the Holocaust’s tendency to stand as a “floating signifier” of other traumatic events. Indeed, other atrocities have appropriated the Holocaust “label,” thus confirming its signifying position for other experiences: “Kosovocaust,” “African Holocaust,” “American Holocaust,” “nuclear Holocaust,” and “abortion Holocaust” (Craps 2013, 75). Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider (2006, 4)

even claim that the Shoah has become a “cosmopolitan memory,” which “harbors the possibility of transcending ethnic and national boundaries” because its changing representations have become politically and culturally symbolic.

Although Theodor Adorno declared in 1951 that writing “poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric” (Hofman 2005, 182), Shoah survivor Elie Wiesel, author of *Night* and Nobel Peace Prize winner, argued that what was needed instead was “a new language that will admit its inability to communicate the inexpressible” (cited in Sicher 2005, x). Indeed, Wiesel first wrote for himself, trying to make sense of his experience. Hence, what came out in 1956 was the 800-page *Un di velt hot geshvign* in Yiddish (Weismann 2004, 141). Only then did it undergo several editions toward the French version, *La Nuit*, published by Les Editions de Minuit in 1958. For him and other first-generation survivors like Primo Levi, the memoir came from a need to transmit and make sense of the past.

Even the cultural production of 9/11 literature is interesting to survey. Shorter forms of literature—essays, poetry, personal testimonies—were the first to appear, as if to directly capture and convey the immediate emotional responses triggered by the attacks. Poems initially surfaced online and were later anthologized by Sam Hamill in 2003. In comparison, longer genres with a more nuanced approach, such as novels and full-length memoirs, took time to be published. Included here are, for example, Frédéric Beigbeder’s (2004) *Windows on the World*, Safran Foer’s (2005) *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and Don De Lillo’s (2007) *Falling Man* (Keniston and Quinn 2008, 3–5).

A writer such as W. G. Sebald (1996, 2001) has also long relied on the image as intrinsically part of his prose. Be it *Austerlitz* or *The Emigrants*, their photographs underscore the presence or absence of trauma. Characterized by the lack of captions, unnamed subjects, and confusing positioning within the text, the images break the traditional strategies of representation, thereby ethically unsettling the reader’s (comfortable) position.

These last examples of novels were written by second- to third-generation authors who, having had no direct personal experience with the traumatic event, obviously no longer wrote in testimonial form as did Wiesel. Efraim Sicher (2005, 174–75) remarks how authors invest imaginatively through the use of postmodern techniques in order to

interrogate, critique, and unsettle the past, a past to which they have no direct access but which still continues to haunt them and their sense of responsibility. It is not surprising therefore that the postmodern novel has become the preferred literary genre in early trauma studies. The novel's aesthetics exhibit spectral presences, aporetic prose, nonlinear narratives, and temporal disruption, among others (Luckhurst 2008, 90).

However, critics such as Kali Tal (1996, 17) have warned against a mandatory and recent elitist use of postmodern aesthetics in order to highlight trauma, thus excluding other possible contexts. She reminds us that the "[l]iterature of trauma is defined by the identity of the author" (ibid., 17). She and others¹⁰ have initiated the so-called "postcolonial turn" within trauma studies by posing a challenge to Caruth's (1996, 11) ethical goal for trauma studies, which, according to her, "may provide the very link between cultures." In other words, this postcolonial turn does not only question the exclusivity of postmodern techniques, but it also interrogates the "privileged" paradigmatic place of the Holocaust.

While maintaining the gravity of the Holocaust and the constant need to commemorate its victims as a remedy against forgetting, I find it interesting to note that critics, such as Jeffrey Alexander (2003, 83) in *The Meanings of Social Life*, ask the following question: "Is the Holocaust Western?" In other parts of the world, he acknowledges, the Holocaust is not a common reference of the Second World War (ibid., 83). Similarly, Huyssen (2003, 99) points out the risk of the Shoah also serving as screen memory, "either enabling a strong memory discourse and bringing a traumatic past to light or blocking any such public reckoning by insisting on the absolute incommensurability of the Holocaust with any other historical case." In other words, although studies, grants, and the discursive proliferations of the Holocaust are needed, especially with alt-right manifestations all over the world today, ironically they may also hide other episodes of history that merit attention "on their own terms and in their own terms," as Craps (2013, 72) argues. Commenting on Caruth's (1996, 24) statement in *Unclaimed Experience* that "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own . . . history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas," Stef Craps (2013, 6) maintains that trauma experiences of people from other nations "not only have to be acknowledged more fully, on their own terms, and in their own terms, but they also have to be considered in relation to traumatic metropolitan or First

World histories for trauma studies to have any hope of redeeming its promise of ethical effectiveness."

In this light, the first volume on African trauma fills a gap. Ewald Mengel and Michela Borzaga (2012), editors of *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary African Novel*, indicate at least the following characteristics which differentiate the African experience from that of Western trauma: the lasting effects of colonization and apartheid, rather than an event such as the Holocaust, and the ability to claim a narrative, faithful to the emancipatory Fanonian tradition. The latter argument alludes to Caruth's deconstructionist approach in *Unclaimed Experience*. For her, traumatic "healing" through narration can only aspire to further aporia. Such a declaration, one can imagine, comes up against the Black tradition that has been resisting oppression, slavery, and stereotype. A nontherapeutic stance waters down redemption and resistance dear to postcolonial advocates.

Here, I do not intend to pit other trauma paradigms against the Holocaust nor even claim comparison with it. How can one? Rather, I propose other models to trauma studies, which are still trying to rub off their Eurocentric label. To draw from Michael Rothberg, the point is not an "either mine or yours" approach to different traumas that might confront each other in the public sphere. In *Multidirectional Memory* Rothberg (2009, 3) explains: "Against the framework that understands collective memory as competitive memory—as a zero-sum struggle over scarce resources—I suggest that we consider memory as multidirectional: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not private." In other words, one must be aware of the dangers of a hierarchization of victimhood in the public sphere.¹¹

Linked to the prickly question of victimhood is the question of ethical empathy. Beset with incidents of "concentration camp pornography" (Oliver 2010, 121), facile appropriations of secondary trauma status (Luckhurst 2008, 3) or even the simple pleasure of the "scopic drive" (Bhabha 1994, 47), is it at all possible, Jo Collins (2011, 7) asks, to assume that empathy would prevent voyeurism? Aside from LaCapra's empathic unsettlement alluded to earlier, cross-traumatic affiliation also paves "a way of bringing different historical traumas into contact in an ethically responsible manner; that is, without collapsing them into one another, preserving the distance between them" (Craps 2013, 17). As I have explained elsewhere, cross-traumatic affiliation "is a disposition which allows one party to relate to the

trauma of another based on the former's own trauma experience while, at the same time, recognizing the uniqueness and difference of each culture's experience" (Martin 2015, 821).

Therefore, without conflating the 9/11 tragedy and the Holocaust to the specific case of the Marcosian martial law nor, conversely, submitting the Philippine politico-traumatic experience to a zero-sum game of victimhood, while respecting each people's different degrees of suffering and, at the same time, maintaining no claim to completely understanding their trauma, we can now proceed to explore the possible contributions of studying Philippine martial law trauma to cultural memory and trauma studies.

A Philippine Trauma

I argue that studying martial law trauma in the Philippines, aside from being a case existing outside the Euro-US sphere, can widen the discussion in cultural memory and trauma studies in at least four ways. First, it challenges the emphasis given to postmodernist narratives by underscoring (again) memoir and poetry writing, which should also be considered as "valid" trauma genres. Second, as far as coming to terms with the past is concerned, an understanding of kapwa and group culture and not only, say, a Freudian one-to-one therapy, would work better in this part of the world. Third, similar to the African perspective, the sacred, as part of "healing," should also be acknowledged. Last but not the least, instead of reparation, a lack of lustration has allowed perpetrators of martial law to reenter public office in the Philippines.

As pointed out in preceding sections, trauma narrative aesthetics tended to be synonymous with nonlinear narratives, spectral motifs, aporetic structures, and temporal disruptions. At the same time, an oeuvre like Elie Wiesel's (1958) *Nuit* was written as a memoir. Should one be against Wiesel's work because it fails to satisfy the aesthetic demands of early trauma studies? Instead of an either-or option (either postmodernist or other), I argue for an inclusive corpus that welcomes more genres and modes of literature—in our present case, poetry, drawings, and journal and letter writing. In this way, trauma studies will be less impoverished by its own elitism.

Because I am not in favor of exclusivity in trauma genres, it is useful to say that martial law trauma has also been conveyed through the postmodern narrative. For example, Gina Apostol's (2010) *Gun Dealers' Daughter* recounts the trauma of a young girl who realizes that her parents, who

work for the Dictator, have orchestrated the deaths of friends around her. The narrator not only is unreliable, changing versions of the narrative from one chapter to another, but she also suffers from survivor's syndrome. Sol's repeated slashing of her wrist calls to mind Caruth's description of trauma victims' oscillation between life and death. The ending likewise hovers between a therapeutic and an aporetic denouement, thus at least unsettling the reader.

Furthermore, while group culture is less significant in the more individualistic West, the importance of kapwa and community in the Philippine context cannot be underestimated. This Filipino barangay or "group culture" can be traced back to its Malay and Indonesian ancestry, which places emphasis on the family (Torres-D'Mello 2001, 47, 61–63; Hall 2001, 54–55). Akin to the Japanese *bushido* spirit, which stresses loyalty, this group culture places the family's need or the group's welfare first before the individual's own interest (Torres D'Mello 2001, 47, 61–63). As Filipino psychologist Virgilio Enriquez (1992, 54) explains, once the "ako [ego] starts thinking of himself as separate from kapwa [fellowmen], the Filipino 'self' gets to be individuated . . . and, in effect, denies the status of kapwa to the other. By the same token, the status of kapwa is also denied to the self."

As seen in her piece, Montiel (2015, 207) sought help, not only from a counsellor but also from different groups and through different ways:

I have also gone into various other healing interventions like acupuncture, tai chi, spiritual retreats, psychological counselling, and regular exercise . . . I have healed progressively with the support of my siblings, colleagues in the Ateneo Psychology Department, and psychospiritual encouragement from the Cenacle Sisters. I have also received tremendous positive energy and guidance from personal friends in two international networks, the Australia Religious Society of Friends or Quakers, and my international academic network of peace psychologists.

Group culture can also be seen in the context of the Yolanda/Haiyan storm surge in November 2013, which, according to Asian Disaster Reduction Center (2013), claimed approximately 6,000 lives.¹² In the study "Obliged to be Grateful," the Filipino sense of kapwa¹³ comes into conflict with targeted interventions "within tight-knit communities . . . when people

are excluded from aid” (Ong et al. 2015, 8). Petty jealousies may result if one neighbor does not benefit and the other does. In other words, Western modes of individualized traumatic help may run against a form of healing that needs to consider group culture.

Notable as well from Montiel’s quote above is the importance of the sacred, which is often put aside in the secularized West.¹⁴ Indeed, the poems of both Gaspar and Montiel clearly allude to Christian motifs. Commenting on his incarceration, Gaspar (1985, 8) reflects: “It was very significant that all this happened during Holy Week. I was able to enter into Christ’s own experience of agony, despair, suffering, resignation and hope.” Moreover, he reveals: “I have told my military interrogators that the reason for my involvement in justice and development issues is my faith commitment” (ibid., 10). Needless to say, Gaspar’s faith helped him make sense of his imprisonment. Even Norman Quimpo avowed being influenced by “the liberal brand of Catholicism” of the Jesuits who showed “concern for the less fortunate” (Quimpo and Quimpo 2012, 71).

Indeed, Bill Ashcroft and colleagues (2006, 8) contend that the “sacred has been an empowering feature of post-colonial experience,” which, unfortunately, has “been one of the most neglected, and may be one of the most rapidly expanding areas of post-colonial study.” Thus, in the Philippines, *kapwa* and the sacred are valued elements of traumatic coming-to-terms. This is contrasted with a more Western one-on-one psychiatric and secularized approach.

However, although the 1986 People Power Revolution marked an “end” to the Marcos dictatorship, a closure appears questionable even today. During the last thirty years, the Marcoses have been able to return to power and even bury their patriarch at the Libingan ng mga Bayani (National Heroes’ Cemetery). Marcosian specters reveal symptoms of a past that has not yet been honored, justified, nor even addressed.

Ironically, for a peaceful forgetting to take place, remembering through narration should be performed: victims of apartheid have to publicly narrate their experience to a listening audience; the sinner would have to recall and say his or her faults to a listening priest; the traumatized patient would need to work-through an often-agonizing past through the talking cure. In our case, not only is martial law traumatic—it still resists being narrated because, in the first place, the Marcoses have been allowed to return to power, benefitting from a lack of lustration.

Lustration, which entails excluding suspected perpetrators from public office, is just one out of several other modes of reparation: trials and prosecution (as in the Nuremberg trials); truth-telling commissions (like in South Africa); apologies (such as what Australia did to the Stolen Generations); restitution (of robbed property, for example); compensation (usually in financial form); and moral reparations (through memorials, a church service, and others) are other means (Mendoza 2013, 120–23). As far as I know, in the Philippines victims have settled for financial compensation, without demanding for a formal apology or a form of truth-telling. Because justice is slow, in the meantime, we accord time to those who can afford to revise history through fake news and memoirs.¹⁵

What is different with the cases of Germany, South Africa, Rwanda, Cambodia, and, to a certain extent, Armenia, for example, is that genocides or massacres have been officially recognized nationally (e.g., Armenia recently built a memorial); prosecutions of perpetrators have officially taken place (e.g., the trials of Pol Pot and former Nazis); and official means of reconciliation or “healing” have also been enacted (e.g., Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa or the local *gacaca* in Rwanda). In other words, in these places trauma has been established by national canonical discourse. In the case of the Philippines, these elements are missing or incomplete. Thus, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. can dare ask: “What am I to apologize for?” (Macaraig 2015). Trauma, unaddressed, is similar to sweeping trash under the carpet.

Forgetting, in this case, is tantamount to allowing injustice. Asked how he thinks non-victims would remember martial law, Karl Gaspar replies,

I doubt if [martial law compensation] had any major impact on non-victims, especially the millennials. This point was made clear during the first few months of the presidency of Duterte, who allowed the burial of Marcos in the heroes’ cemetery. The only ones who were publicly enraged were those who already knew about the abuses during that era. (ICTJ 2017)

The Quimpos (2012, xviii) share the concern to remember:

Our family's history is just one of many of families that suffered in the course of the struggle against the dictatorship. At the *Bantayog ng mga Bayani*, we have scrutinized the names in the displays and on the Wall of Remembrance. . . . What little we know of their stories . . . the names of young heroes and martyrs who were among the best and truest of their generation.

Thus, in the name of justice and peace, we need to document such kinds of traumatic memory, such as Montiel's, Gaspar's, and the Quimpos', in order to read through and work through the horrors of the past.

Notes

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- 1 Although the official years of martial law spanned from 1972 to 1981, the Philippines suffered from Marcos's dictatorship until his ouster in 1986.
- 2 This phrase is a remark from Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.
- 3 Freud (1914, 153) berates "childish" patients who "can use their treatment as an excuse to luxuriate in their symptoms."
- 4 One may access Montiel's work online (<http://psycnet.apa.org/record/2015-15270-001>).
- 5 *Anamnesis* means deliberate recollection, as opposed to *mneme*, which is a random form of remembering. See Ricœur's (2003) seminal oeuvre, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli* [Memory, History, Forgetting].
- 6 Aside from the Quimpos and Gaspar, the following authors have also published testimonials on martial law: Lualhati Milan Abreu, Mila Aguilar, and Thelma Arceo. However, for this article, I will not include Abreu's (2009) *Agaw-Dilim, Agaw-Liwanag* because my proficiency in Filipino is not yet good; nor Aguilar's (2013) *The Nine Deaths of M*, a fictionalized narrative, which is fine in its own right; nor Arceo's (2013) *Recollections*, a secondary account of her son's activism, not hers. However, I look forward to reading and writing about them at another time.
- 7 I refer here to LaCapra's (2001, 41, 78) notion of "empathic unsettlement," which advocates listening empathically yet understanding the difference of the other's experience, thus refusing to dilute the other's narrative into one's own.
- 8 The former seems to exemplify Ricœur's (2003) "back-up forgetting," while the latter alludes to a form of commanded amnesia. According to the French philosopher, "back-up forgetting" is oblivion "in reserve." In our normal state of forgetting we remember having forgotten something. Commanded amnesia, however, implies intentional forgetting (*ibid.*).

- 9 *Bartolina* refers to a cell used for solitary confinement, oftentimes barely big enough to fit a person. I conserved all the noncapitalized and italicized terms in the original.
- 10 See, e.g., Andermahr 2015; Craps 2013; Rothberg 2009; Visser 2011.
- 11 Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman's (2007) seminal work, *L'Empire du traumatisme: Enquête sur la condition de victime* [The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood], warns us about the dangers of pitting one case of victimhood against or over another. The authors investigate how the status of victim is used, not as a clinical concern, but as a demand for justice. Fassin and Rechtman examine compensation laws that aim to recognize trauma as compensable nonphysical injury. For example, new illnesses such as *sinistrosis*, or the refusal to return to work until financial compensation has been awarded, have appeared. They also look into the dangers of privileging certain types of pain over others, for instance, "singular shocking suffering" over "everyday subordination." Conflicts such as these echo the words of Tzvetan Todorov and David Belos (2003, 143): "To have been a victim gives you the right to complain, to protest, and to make demands."
- 12 Climate trauma is another growing research area.
- 13 Aside from the idea of *kapwa*, two other Filipino concepts, *bahala na* and *hiya*, can be considered. Initially compared to a sort of fatalism, *bahala na* has since then been redefined by Lagmay (1993) as "determination and risk-taking." Likewise, *hiya*, which has traditionally been translated as "shame," should actually more appropriately be understood as "sense of propriety" (Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino 2000, 55). One can speculate how both concepts could impact martial law trauma. For instance, could *bahala na* have influenced the lack of healing from martial law trauma? Does *hiya* keep Filipinos from acknowledging trauma? I thank the anonymous peer reviewer who suggested these two points. These ideas merit a separate research beyond the present study.
- 14 The notion of the sacred, however, has recently been recognized in trauma treatment in the West. See, e.g., Walker et al. 2015; Gingrich and Gingrich 2017. I thank the peer reviewer for these references.
- 15 For example, that of Juan Ponce Enrile (cf. Fonbuena 2012).

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