

No Storm Shall Return Without a Promise of Safety: Reflections on a Visit to Tacloban Six Years After Yolanda

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The fourth league of *The Boy Abunda Talk Workshop (BATAW)*, a public speaking workshop, happened in Tacloban City from 25 to 27 January 2019. Selected participants presented their speeches replete with Yolanda narratives during a discussion facilitated by Dr. Boy Abunda, a Filipino TV host and *BATAW* head trainer. Listening to them who mostly talked in Waray, I was amazed at the mutual intelligibility between Waray and my mother tongue, *Bol-anong Binisaya*, having studied Cebuano-Tagalog-English-Spanish comparative linguistics.

While I had to enjoy *#trabakasyon* [portmanteau of *trabaho* (work) and *bakasyon* (vacation)], I could not help but feel for the locals whose painful memories of the Super Typhoon Yolanda inevitably resurfaced. Their stories were beautiful, not because of their use of flowery and persuasive language, but because they were real and unscripted. There was an overflow of emotions from these talk-workshop participants. While we were in a van, one of the participants started to remember her experiences during Yolanda. While she was recounting, I looked around the city: I saw the streets, not the clean ones, but those that were covered with debris, and obliterated by the storm surge. I looked at the mountains

not the ones filled with trees, but those which were occupied with Taclobanons scrambling to higher ground. I looked at the violent Pacific Ocean with the dead scattered in the water. I looked around as if seeing the titanic, violent waves. I looked at the coconut trees and the whole vicinity of the hotel being inundated by the storm surge. I saw buildings and banks being looted. I saw an old woman tying herself around the post of the building so that she would not be washed away, only to find out the water had gone beyond the roof. She died. I saw a mother carrying her two daughters, who had to let one of them go. They all died. As the teller continued to tell her stories, I looked up the sky and heard gale-force winds pounding the whole city.

According to Turner (1974, 37), “social dramas are units of a harmonic process, arising in conflict situations.” Turner enumerates four elements of social drama: Breach, Crisis, Redressive Action, and Reintegration/Schism. In this occurrence, the Breach and Crisis refer to the coming of the storm and its consequential destruction. Redressive Action pertains to what had been done to deal with the state of calamity and resolve the Breach. Reintegration/Schism is the overall resolution to restore the normal day-to-day living of the Taclobanons. The Breach and the Crisis felt six years ago are lamented today because of the Redressive Actions that may not have been effected properly because of political issues.

In my silence, I felt a solid connection to these Taclobanons, both the living and the dead. Their stories persuade us to throw away our “yellow” or “red” political affiliations which are fueled by greed, not by love, mercy and compassion. Although politically based systems are inherent in the Philippine society, they should not be used to dehumanize in any way.

Dr. Abunda always reminded the participants to “Listen to one’s story” or “End your speech strong.” In my sojourn in Tacloban, I did not only listen to their stories; I also felt them. I was moved. They ended so strongly and moved me to tell their stories as I went back to Manila. The plane home took off at 8:00 in the evening on 27 January 2019. Sitting on

17F, I peeped outside and saw the hodgepodge of sparkling lights below. I asked myself whether we were traversing the same pathway of the eye of the typhoon before it hit the ground. Way up high, their stories and their *tingog* (a Cebuano term for ‘voice’) never faded, they became even more reverberating.

I only had a three-day sojourn in Tacloban, but the *Taclobanons* had been and will always be there. With the menace of climate change and other volatile environmental conditions, my fervent prayer as I am writing this essay is that in the years to come, no storm “shall return” without a promise of safety. In the discourse of this social drama, it is about time we pulled away from colored affiliations and reached out to each other through *bayanihan*. It is by curating the spirit of political coherence and consonance that we are able to see the brighter “silver linings” before, during, and after the storm.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Dr. Cecilia F. Genuino for being the first reader of this essay. I would also like to thank the editorial staff of *Asian Studies* for their helpful comments on the earlier version of this travel narrative.

Reference

Turner, Victor. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.