

The Coalescence of Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory in the Compendium of Testimonial Writings (*Pagtatagpo sa Kabilang Dulo: Panitikang Testimonial ng Desaparecidos*)

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Abstract

This research correlates the oral history with the testimonial writings about the desaparecidos during the term of President Ferdinand Marcos, in 1965 and until the Arroyo administration in 2010. To establish the relationship between oral history and memorial texts, this phenomenological study gravitated around the discussion between *cultural trauma*—the objective projection of the horrible experiences of the victims and *collective memory*—the subjective representations of shared experiences among the surviving relatives of the desaparecidos. With oral history vis-à-vis testimonial works or cultural trauma vis-à-vis collective memory as the focal point of the paper's discussion, the study established that cultural trauma and collective memory are linked because of the lived experiences of the families and friends of the desaparecidos. Moreover, cultural trauma expressed in oral history is processed through collective memory of the family and friends of desaparecidos who create memorial texts that help perpetuate the memory of the disappeared. This study recommends that researches problematizing the cultural trauma of the family and friends of desaparecidos be utilized as forum of ideas in order to sustain the collectivity as a force to reckon with so that no enforced disappearance ever happens again.

Keywords: desaparecidos, cultural trauma, collective memory

Introduction

Desaparecido is originally a Spanish word, a past participle of *desaparecer* which means to disappear. In another application of the term, it refers to victims of state terrorism in Chile and Argentina during the 1970s and 1980s which used the infamous “death flights” where the victims’ bodies were jettisoned

from airplanes into the sea (Lagman, *Desaparecido*, par.11). In the *Rome Statute of International Criminal Court*, *desaparecido* means a person who is arrested, detained, or abducted by or with the authorization, support or acquiescence of, a state or a political organization, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the

intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time (p. 5). In the Philippines, under the Republic Act 10353 also known as *Act Defining and Penalizing Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance*, desaparecido consists of three elements: the person of enforced disappearance is deprived of liberty via an arrest, detention, or abduction, the perpetrators are state agents or working with the “authorization, support, or acquiescence” of the state, there is a conscious effort to conceal the location of the disappeared person. Among definitions, CNN’s is the most denunciatory when it claims that a desaparecido is a description for who could not be found since martial law. This alludes to the situation during the regime of Marcos when so many disappearances took place specifically after the declaration of martial law, under Proclamation 1081.

Enforced disappearance is deeply rooted in the exploitative and oppressive system that breeds poverty and violation of basic human rights. It is an instrument of repression resorted to by a government whose policies are opposed or assailed by critical members of society. It is often committed on the pretext of maintaining peace and order and protecting national security from those conveniently labeled as “enemies of the state. (FIND, p. 3). Enforced disappearance has been used by dictatorial regimes as a means of repressing suspected political opponents. It is difficult to prosecute perpetrators as the very nature of the disappearance involves the obliteration of evidence, thereby limiting the possibility of establishing criminal responsibility of State accountability.

It was only in 1974 that the first documentation for the missing persons was initiated by Task Force Detainees of the Philippines (TFDP), the pioneer human rights organization in the country which observes that the incidence of involuntary disappearance as a form of human rights violation.

In the profiling of the desaparecidos, TFDP noted that the victims were usually persons with actual or alleged involvement in the struggle for social transformation or in upholding and defending the civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of the people. Most of the disappeared were political activists or critics of the government. (FIND, p. 5)

In Philippine history, the biggest number of desaparecidos or victims of enforced or involuntary disappearances was recorded during the term of President Ferdinand Marcos, between 1965 until 1986. Under Marcos, a total of 878 cases of forced disappearances was documented; 138 of these missing persons were eventually found alive while 127 were confirmed dead. In total, there are still 613 to locate. The 535 out of 613 were disappearances that happened between 1983 to 1985 which was the height of the atrocities perpetuated by the Marcos regime before its fall in 1986 (“Hope and Despair,” par. 4). When Corazon Aquino became the president in 1986 due to the popular EDSA People Power, the level of grave human rights violations throughout the country remained high. This was attributed to the need to maintain the support of loyal military leaders by not prosecuting military personnel accused of human rights violations. During Aquino’s term, there were 612 documented disappearances—407 of the victims were still missing, 108 surfaced alive and 97 were found dead. The disappearances continued in the terms of succeeding presidents that followed Aquino. The administration of Fidel Ramos had 87 cases of disappearances, 40 of whom are still missing, and 10 were found dead while the abbreviated term of Joseph Ejercito Estrada had a record of 60 activists missing, 39 resurfaced alive, and five were found dead. Arroyo’s term was marred by electoral fraud, massive misuse of public funds and with transgressions of civil liberties and human rights. Based on FIND’s record, there were 95 documented victims, 47 still missing, 41 surfaced alive and 7 were found dead.

These numbers prove that even after the fall of Marcos dictatorship, disappearances continue to happen. Circa Rodrigo Duterte's presidency, more disappearances happened due to "fabricated drug war operations. FIND has yet to show the documented number of disappearances during Duterte's term but numbers continue to grow with no promise of let-up because the son of the dictator, Ferdinand Marcos Jr sits as the next president of the Republic of the Philippines. Fifty six years past Marcos era has not healed the wounds of the family and friends of desaparecidos. With no graves to visit, with no closure to the agony of uncertainty, those left behind continue to be haunted by ghosts of the disappeared.

While the disappeared may have found their final resting place, those left behind continue to search for them. Not until there is a certainty of their departure, the family and friends of the missing continue their search. And every attempt to search, to locate the disappeared is trauma for them. It means revisiting the horrible experience, reliving the fear, the agony, the suffering, the hopelessness, and all the ugly reminders of the disappearance. The irony here tells that while the disappeared may have met their brutal fate with finality, those left behind have to contend with the uncertainty, anxiety because there is still that void that needs a closure.

The Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory of "Those Left Behind"

The pervasiveness of trauma to the three branches of disciplines such as natural science, social science, and humanities gives way to various definitions formulated by professional groups and individuals. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) under the US Department of Health and Human Services explains that *trauma* "results from an event, series of events, or set of

circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (2014). The American Psychological Association (APA, 2017) describes trauma as *an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster*, while the Center for Treatment of Anxiety and Mood Disorders, a regional clinic of the National Social Anxiety Center (2017) which is run by a team of American psychiatrists and psychologists explains trauma as a *psychological, emotional response to an event or an experience that is deeply distressing or disturbing*. Similar meaning is given by the Australian Psychological Society (2017) which puts trauma as *experiences which are life threatening or pose significant threat to a person's physical or psychological wellbeing*.

While medical professionals give accurate and scientific discussions for trauma studies, yet the cutting-edge research and the most influential and encompassing insights about trauma have come from people from a field that might appear to be irrelevant to it: Literature. Some of the best discourses made are those which were developed by academicians namely: Prof. Cathy Caruth—a professor of English and Comparative Literature, Prof. Shohana Felman—a Comparative Literature professor, and Prof. Jeffrey Alexander—a professor of Sociology. Caruth reworked Freud's "traumatic neurosis" and connected to post traumatic stress disorder and comes up with the definition for trauma: *an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of* (1996, p. 11). Felman has made a rejoinder to the claim of Caruth regarding the belatedness or delayed experience in trauma. She explained that if trauma is recalled belatedly, it provides an opportunity for victims and survivors to bear witness to the harrowing experiences

by listening to their voices (2002). The delayed reliving of the traumatic experiences as well as the act of witnessing i.e. listening, empathizing are the major ideas espoused by Caruth and Felman which have become the seminal ideas for the formulation of the Literary Trauma Theory. On the other hand, it was Alexander who conceived the definition for cultural trauma by establishing a clear distinction between individual or lay trauma and cultural trauma. Whereas individual trauma is a spontaneous emotional response to a calamitous event, cultural trauma is not immediately perceived as catastrophic. Rather the perception undergoes a long process of assimilation and signification. Events in cultural trauma enter a series of integration in the consciousness of the collectivity. As Alexander explains, *“cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways* (2012, p.18)

Cultural trauma captures all that surrounds the disappearance of the victims and how it impacts those looking for them. Those left behind would remember everything, from the forcible arrest, to the physical torture inflicted upon them, to the mental torment and then the pointless search to find the disappeared and then to nothingness. These experiences comprise the horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon the family and friends of the desaparecidos. And while the missing are yet to be located, the uncertainty in waiting for so long adds up to the harsh memories about the capture of the desaparecido leaving them the feeling that they—those left behind would never be the same again, their lives have changed, their identity disparate and the damage irreversible.

Complementing the cultural trauma is collective memory. In cultural trauma, marked memories

are retained in the group’s consciousness that create a collective identity for the group. These shared pool of memories of a group of people with common identity is called collective memory. Simply put, it refers to shared recollection or how a group remembers its past. While cultural trauma is psychological, collective memory is social. The nature of response in cultural trauma involves the group’s consciousness or awareness while collective memory is the memories of a group of people who have collected them through shared social experiences. Cultural trauma deals with an objective cognizance of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the desaparecidos and therefore they are external stimuli. The collective memory is an experience processed within and shared outwardly. Whereas cultural trauma is an external stimulus that enters and invades the person, collective memory is a stored experience culled inside the witness or surviving relative of the desaparecido.

Also called “societal remembrance”, collective memory refers to how we remember things through a social lens. In the case of the family and friends of the disappeared, the act of remembering is social in nature because their memories are formed and reformed in social contexts. (Halbwachs, p. 51). Though it involves shared recollection, collective memory is different from history. Unlike history which aims to provide a comprehensive, accurate, and unbiased portrayal of past events after the integration and comparison of multiple perspectives, collective memory focuses only a single perspective, that is, the perspective of one social group or community. Thus, collective memory represents past events associated with the values, narratives and biases specific to that group only. (Wersch and Roediger, p. 320)

Collective memory is expressed in numerous forms—including oral and written narratives, monuments, and other memorials, commemorative

rituals, and symbols—and serves a range of functions, such as establishing and maintaining relationships, teaching or entertaining others, and supporting group identity. In the case of the Philippine desaparecidos, there is a nationwide mass organization known as **FIND** or Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance which systematize all its actions, plans, missions of the group. Composed of families, relatives, friends, and colleagues of the disappeared victims and even for surfaced desaparecidos, this association advocates for human rights protection. Its mission is to search for the disappeared, upholds and actively works for the protection of persons from enforced disappearances. FIND also has linked with the Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations for the eventual global eradication of enforced disappearances.

FIND is also responsible for the official headcount of the missing persons, surfaced desaparecidos, and those who were found dead. It continues its untiring search for the missing ones, its representation for the families of desaparecidos in the litigation of cases, in publicizing the break through and setbacks in its search for the missing. Overall, FIND provides structure, character, and identity to the organization consisted of surviving family members and friends of the missing.

Cultural Trauma: The Haunting of “Those Left Behind” by the Desaperidos

Trauma is anchored on Freud’s basic psychoanalytic paradigm (1922) which posits that the unconscious is the ultimate source and explanation of human thought and behavior. As there are limitations to what a human person can absorb in his/her system, the subconscious becomes at the receiving ends if the overwhelming amount of stress exceeds

a person’s coping mechanism. This means that the subconscious becomes the repository of trauma whether the victim likes it or not. Using this as a framework, Caruth (1996) was the first to conceptualize the Trauma Theory which was based on Freud’s deliberations of traumatic neurosis. It explains the psychological trauma of the victim brought about by a horrendous event which overwhelms the individual’s ability to cope, and leaves that person fearing death, annihilation, mutilation, or psychosis. This horrendous event may recur to the victim repetitively. Caruth’s groundbreaking work dwells on the victims’ belated experience of a recurring incident. This explains that the traumatic experiences are replayed to the victim not in real time. Caruth even states that this belated consequence is a “missed encounter” because the experience is something that failed to be located in an actual time and place. To associate the traumatic experience as “absent” and acknowledge this as a virtual reality is enough realization to cure the victim because the trauma is a thing of the past.

The Cultural Trauma Theory explains the five significant and interwoven elements stated as follows:

1. cultural trauma involves a group of people subjected to a horrendous event
2. the event must be recognized and felt by members of a collective group as horrendous
3. the cultural trauma must be deeply felt profoundly leaving indelible marks upon the group’s consciousness
4. the group’s consciousness is supposed to be haunted by the memories of the event forever
5. the memories change the future identity of the suffering group and result in increased membership in the collectivity (Alexander 2004, p.11)

These five attributes are used to illustrate the cultural trauma of the family and friends of the desaparecidos. As postulated in the scholarly discourses of Prof. Jeffrey Alexander, these attributes are clearly discussed and exemplified in the oral history shared by the family and friends of the desaparecidos. They are as follows:

1. Cultural Trauma Involves a Group of People Subjected to a Horrendous Event

The horrendous event alluded to in the cultural trauma involves the sinister circumstances behind the capture of each desaparecido. To bear witness to it or even to listen to the first hand account of the witnesses is horrendous enough to break any person much more a family or a friend. The family members were the witnesses themselves or the one who knew first hand information about the abduction of the desaparecidos. This oral history from the bereaved families and friends of the desaparecidos illustrated how a collective group experienced a horrendous event. From **Editha Burgos**, mother of Jonas Burgos:

“Galing si Jonas Burgos sa isang miting kasama ang mga magsasakang miyembro ng ALYANSA NG MAGSASAKA, Bulacan Chapter. Tumuloy siya sa isang restoran sa Ever Gotesco, Caloocan City, tanghali ng Abril 27, 200. Habang kumakain si Jonas ay nilapitan siya ng mga armadong lalaki. Nagsisisigaw si Jonas na “Aktibista lang ako!” habang kaladkad palabas at sapilitang isinakay sa isang van na may plakang TAB 194. Hindi na nakita pang muli si Jonas. Samantala ang sasakyang ginamit sa pagdukot kay Jonas ay nakita sa headquarters ng Army, 56th Infantry Battallion sa Norzagaray sa Bulacan”. (Jonas Burgos came from a meeting with farmers who are members of ALYANSA NG

MAGSASAKA, Bulacan Chapter. He stayed at a restaurant in Ever Gotesco, Caloocan City, noon on April 27, 200. While Jonas was eating, armed men approached him. Jonas shouts “I’m just an activist!” while being dragged out and forced into a van with the license plate TAB 194. Jonas was never seen again. Meanwhile, the vehicle used to abduct Jonas was seen at the headquarters of the Army, 56th Infantry Battalion in Norzagaray, Bulacan)

From the oral history came the accounts from the family and friends of desaparecidos. They are a testament to the horrible experience that they suffered and continue to suffer being related to someone in the movement. Even while these desaparecidos were still alive, they started to suffer as soon as they had accepted their decision to join the revolutionary group. Their agony began the moment their husband, wife, daughter, son, sister, and brother stepped out of the house. Every day of separation gave them continuous worry. When their enforced disappearance happened, the fear has come to surface, this time more pronounced because the inevitable was right before their eyes. Their suffering is more agonizing because this is a mental torture that does not end. There are nagging questions that continuously haunt them: “Nasaan na kaya siya?” “Kumain na kaya siya?” “Buhay pa kaya siya? This collective group is not even in the forefront of the crackdown, but they too agonize from the brunt of the brutal military force that captured, detained, tortured and perhaps killed their desaparecidos.

2. The Event Must be Recognized and Felt by Members of a Collective Group as Horrendous

The horrendous fate of the desaparecidos has propelled their family members and

friends to come together to find comfort and solace from each other's grief. Knowing each other's story is an acknowledgement of a shared experience that is horrendous enough to break a person if not made open to fellow sufferer. Says **Edita Burgos** on the fate of son Jonas who disappeared in 2007 *"Jonas is remembered, more dearly now, than ever before. The abductors and brains of this cruel inhumanity of enforced disappearance have failed in their attempt to erase the memory of Jonas and how he loved his poor countrymen."* This is the same feeling expressed by **Bonifacio Ilagan**, who made a narrative for Southern Tagalog 10—the ten desaparecidos who were abducted summarily in 1977 and were never found after. He felt the heavy burden not only for the disappearance of his own sister, Rizalina but for the nine others who never returned after the abduction. He commiserated with the family, relatives and friends of the ST 10 saying:

"Nang kami ay magkita-kita nitong Hulyo 2002, ipinagdiwang namin ang buhay ng mga minartir naming mahal at nagtanong kami kung ang ganoon aysapat na bilang pagsasara sa aming kolektibong pighati. May ilang hindi umimik at minsan pang nawalan ng lakas sa bigat ng pasakit. Ngunit mayroon ding nagpahayag na kailangan naming sindihan minsan pa, ang ningas ng paghahanap ng hustisya." (When we met in July 2002, we celebrated the lives of our beloved martyrs and asked if that was enough closure for our collective grief. Some did not say a word and once again lost strength due to the weight of the pain. But there are also those who have expressed that we need to light one more time, the flame of the search for justice.)

In 2009, **Dee Ayroso** wrote this in memory of husband Honor: *"At mas lalong walang dahilan ngayon para sumuko. Lahat naman tayo ay mamamatay, ang mahalagay ay para kanino mo ginugol ang buhay mo, sagot niya sa akin kapag nag-aalala ako. At halos walong taon na akong nag-aalala. Kailangan ko pa bang sabihin kung gaano ko kamahal si Honor at paano ako nilalamon ng lungkot at pangungulila sa halos walong taong wala siya?"* (And now there is no reason to give up. We are all going to die, what matters is for whom you spent your life for, he answered me when I was worried. And I've been worried for almost eight years. Do I need to say how much I love Honor and how I am consumed by sadness and longing for almost eight years without her?). Another wife, **Rose Arado** wrote her anguish for the injustice her husband, Leonilo suffered from that horrible event—enforced disappearance. She narrated: *When Leonilo opted to live a life with the oppressed, he knew the consequence of being tagged a communist, terrorist, a destabilizer, a threat to the society. This is the price of being faithful to the cause of building a just and humane society. This is truly a noble endeavor. And I have never regretted that we are together in this cause. Until that night of April 12, when some unidentified armed men forcibly abducted you. I almost couldn't believe that we are now starting to face the fascist attack of this regime.*

In the case of **Hermon Lagman**, his sister Nilda Cecilia Lagman Sevilla accused the Marcos government of defiling the memory of his brother: *"It really jars one's imagination to think of a very gentle, loving, thoughtful, sensitive man being subjected to dehumanizing indignities. I would rather reread Mon's letters and writings*

than allow State perpetrated violence to violate my memory of a brother, a comrade, and a hero."

These recollections from a mother, a comrade, a wife, and a sister comprise the collective voice of the surviving relatives and friends of the desaparecidos. In their narratives, they revisited the horrendous events that left them broken. Each testimony allows an occasion for identification of feeling because the stories are one and the same. The horrendous events surrounding the disappearance of the victims have a common pattern: abduction, no lead to follow, no perpetrators identified, fruitless search for the missing, hopelessness for the injustice. This indeed is atrocious for a collective group—the family and friends who may never find closure to their harrowing experience.

3. The Cultural Trauma Must be Deeply Felt as Profoundly Leaving Indelible Marks Upon the Group's Consciousness

In each case of enforced disappearance, the family and friends of the desaparecidos are ready to admit to have owned an invisible scar brought about by the trauma of losing a child, a spouse, a sibling, a friend, and a comrade. The scar is a reminder of the woundedness of the those left behind who have yet to silence the emotional turmoil and calm the nerves as a consequence of the horrible event. Actually, what Alexander specified in the Cultural Trauma Theory as indelible mark upon the group's consciousness may refer to the representations of suffering which is tied to the misery of the family and friends of the desaparecidos. The *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* features a group of works called 'scar literature'. This is a new genre of fiction which emerged after the cultural revolution in China. Also called 'wound literature', it comprises stories that dwell on mental and physical scars left to intellectual

and cadres by the previous decade of radical politics in China. Intended to be cathartic, scar literature was an attempt to cleanse the wounds suffered by the people during the 1960s. Most of the writers of scar literature narrated the persecution, denunciation, beating and even execution of victims of the government.

In dictionary.com, one of the definitions for scar states "*a lasting aftereffect of trouble, especially a lasting psychological injury resulting from suffering or trauma.*" Taking this meaning into account, it means that the woundedness of the family and friends of desaparecidos is beyond healing. This can be rationalized by the fact that there is no finality to the fate of the desaparecidos because it needs closure. This is a chasm that needs to be filled like that one piece of puzzle that will give a complete picture. Unless the disappeared appears, then that indelible mark remains forever. The scar is not physical but emotional and mental in form. In this study, the scar is a reminder of the suffering that combines fear, anxiety, and hopelessness. Like a wound, it is initially painful but as time goes by, the soreness fades and leaves a scar. There comes a time that a wound permanently closes because of the scar. This compares to a heart that becomes livid and immune inside. Scar thickens like a heart that hardens and stops beating and feeling. Yet, when one closely scrutinizes the scar, the hurt revisits the person, bringing back memories of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the beloved spouse, child, sibling, friend, and comrade.

4 and 5. The Group's Consciousness is Haunted by the Memories of the Event Changing the Future Identity of the Suffering Group and Resulting in Increased Membership in the Collectivity

The scars are permanent welts on the skin. This compares to the perpetual suffering that

remains among the families and friends of the desaparecidos. And since this suffering is brought by the trauma, it definitely recurs and inflicts the collectivity. **Edita Burgos** has not stopped from her crusade. Since the Arroyo administration until the reign of Duterte, she relentlessly pursues all avenues to locate her son, Jonas. She has been persistently leading the social gatherings for the families and friends of Philippine desaparecidos. **Bonifacio Ilagan** is active in the organization Pamilya ng Desaparecidos Para sa Katarungan because he wants to memorialize the heroic sacrifices of the Southern Tagalog 10. Bonifacio culled the narratives about the ST 10. **Dee Ayroso**, an in-house writer in Bulatlat.com—an alternative news site, continues to use her pen to write in loving memory of Honor Ayroso, dear husband and comrade. She is actively involved in the production of materials for the desaparecidos. **Congressman Edcel Lagman** organizes an annual gathering of the families and friends of desaparecidos because disappearances continue. He has pursued and actively campaigned for the passing of Republic Act 10353, also known as Anti-Enforced or Involuntary Disappearance Act of 2012. It is the official legislation that was passed to address the issue of enforced disappearances.

These are the few personalities from the congregation of the families and friends of the desaparecidos who were first to bring the case of the victims to public attention. The first documented case of enforced disappearance, i.e. the abduction of Charlie del Rosario in 1971 had also put the bereaved families of the desaparecidos in the outset of collective initiatives to find the missing. Through the entire period of the perpetuation of the military's abduction of the enemies of the state, from Marcos regime to Dutertes administration, the concerned collectivity had organized themselves

together for an advocacy of a common end—to locate the desaparecidos, in whatever state they may be. These personalities have stepped up to continue the representation for the disappeared.

There are two leading organizations that continue to struggle for the eventual eradication of enforced disappearances in the country: **FIND** or Families of Victims of Involuntary Disappearance and Pamilya ng Desaparecidos Para sa Katarungan (**DESAPARECIDOS**). These two organizations are an assurance that there are still institutions in our society that will continue representation for the interest of the desaparecidos. These desaparecidos sustained the struggle for freedom and better life amid political repression and defended human rights at the risk of life and liberty. Putting premium to the interests of the desaparecidos and their bereaved families and friends, these organizations have put structure and character to the collectivity. In effect, there is an increased membership to this collective group as there is an increase in the disappearances particularly because of the all out drug war effected by Duterte administration.

The Creative Output from the Collective Memory: Testimonial Writings from the Family and Friends of the Desaparecidos

In 1980s, Dr. James Pennebaker, an American social psychologist and a Centennial professor at the University of Texas, Austin, conceived a unique form of therapy called Expressive Writing – a writing session wherein one writes about one's thoughts or feelings related to a personally stressful or traumatic life experience. It is an approach that has been found in primary research which aids the healing process following a traumatic experience and can bring about a reduction in biological indicators

of stress and stress-related illness. EW has also been shown in individual studies to produce positive health benefits including effects on blood pressure, immune function, wound healing, sleep, depression, and pain. Expressive Writing is compared to a written disclosure, because writers are instructed to disclose personal information, thoughts, and feelings. Unlike communicative forms of writing, expressive writing is personal, free flowing, and informal, often without concern for style, spelling, punctuation, or grammar. In the Pennebaker paradigm, EW is meant for the topics that need release from memory, those ugly reminders that remain in the deepest corner of consciousness that needs to be addressed, those memories that still need to be processed, those that need closure.

This is somehow similar to the preliminaries applied to the family and friends of the desaparecidos in order to cull from their collective memory the first creative output penned by the friends and family of the desaparecidos. Memory and imagination collaborates to give the necessary stimulus to propel them to write. It was a painful and liberating process at the same time. In the case of the first testimonial writings for the desaparecidos which this study termed as memorial literature, there were moderators who goad them to a writing procedure. They were asked to close their eyes and think of a safe space. They were asked to explain why they considered this an ideal place. Afterwards, the moderators asked them what would destroy or damage that safe space. In another instruction, they were asked to visualize a television and were asked the characters they want to watch from the TV screen.

In this workshop, the participants' memory were somehow pricked to trigger recollection of their fond memories with their desaparecidos. The participants' tasks were individually accomplished and yet in the end, they all produce memories

which are collected from shared social experiences. In order to make the families and friends of the desaparecidos, they were provide occasion where they can all engage in a shared recollections. The memory is common to the group, but is remembered by individuals and the workshop gave structure to these collective memories in the form of testimonial literature or memorial texts.

The term "memorial" originates from Latin *memoria* which means memory; this evolves to Latin *memorialis* and *memorial* referring to something that serves as a legacy or reminder. The English "memorial" as a modifier to literature takes the same meaning from its Latin etymology i.e. something by which the memory of a person, thing, or event is preserved ("memorial"). An academic definition of memorial literature is given in the European Journal of English Studies by cultural studies scholars, Prof. Ann Rigney and Astrid Erll who wrote that memorial literature consists of writings that become repositories of "*memories that are shared within generations and across different generations which are the product of public acts of remembrance*" (2006, p. 112). Having cultural memory as their area of interest, both see the role of literature as sites of memory. The same definition applies to the classification of works comprising Holocaust literature i.e. writings wrought from the collective memories of the Holocaust victims. These European Jewry who survived the Nazi genocide gave literary form to their harrowing experiences using stories, memoirs, elegies, diaries, poems, and novels. History attests to the cultural trauma of the survivors who have to live with the horrors of mass murder done by the Germans to the 30,000 Jews between 1933 to 1945 in Eastern Europe. The Holocaust memorial literature has provided them with the avenue to confront this harsh footnote in their history via memorial writings. After the holocaust and after they left Europe, Jewish immigrants organized communities that also serve as their mutual

benefit societies. Known as *Landsmanschaft*, these societies were commissioned to write the *Yizker*, a vast body of memorial books commemorating Jewish communities destroyed in the Holocaust. A greater part of *Yizker* is comprised of the Holocaust memorial literature (Horowitz, 2011).

In the Philippines, not one compilation or anthology of memorial literature has been published, though many forms of memorial literature such as elegies, eulogies, poems, dramas, novels have been in circulation. Events such as revolutions (Philippine revolution, Edsa Revolution) wars (World War II, Japanese Invasion, siege at Marawi against ISIS), natural calamities (Typhoon Ondoy, Typhoon Yolanda), political disturbances (coup d'etat impeachment), violence (murder, extra-judicial killings), and crimes (rape, murder, plunder) which the writers personally experienced are sites of memories which awaken individual and collective trauma—the catalyst for memorial writing. Such major upheavals etched in the memory are enough to give any person or group of persons the compulsion to write. Witnesses of traumatic events often find themselves in a situation where the natural tendency to them is to articulate the inarticulable. That in the process of articulating the trauma through individual or collective narratives, there is the process of undoing oneself, the remaking of the self.

Felman (2002) on the other hand stipulates that the testimonies of the witnesses which she describes as the act of bearing witness provides a necessary and vital response to trauma. Felman elaborates that the very act of speaking in the first person is therapeutic because it puts the witnesses to a compromising position because they all are compelled to speak the truth. They are made to confront the ugly side of reality, talk about it, validate it, and get that thing “off their chest.”

The Coalescence of Cultural Trauma and Collective Memory in the Compendium of Testimonial Writings (*Pagtatagpo sa Kabilang Dulo: Panitikang Testimonial ng Desaparecidos*)

Considering the almost six decades of continuous instances of disappearances in Philippine history, only three publications were produced about it. While protest literary writings abound in Philippine literature, there was a dearth of writings about desaparecidos. These publications even came far and between. The reason is attributed to the fact that dealing with an enforced disappearance is more difficult than having to face death. For the families and friends of desaparecidos, the torment is more punitive than simply accepting the tragedy of death. Once a beloved is given a proper burial, the story closes with finality. This is not true for desaparecidos. They are continuously sought and accounted for, missed and prayed over. And so, there are no elegies, no eulogies, no posthumous biographies, no memorial texts written yet for the disappeared.

Edita Burgos, mother of a desaparecido, had seen the need to perpetuate the memories of their dear departed ones because this is one of the ways to continue their fight. Photographs, paintings, mementos, letters, text messages as well as oral histories, voice recordings, music, performances and all repositories of the horrible experiences and fond memories needed to be preserved. In oral histories, the cultural trauma has its depository and in testimonial literature, the collected memories were given artistic form. Burgos explained:

“Iniluwal ang Pagtatagpo sa Kabilang Dulo: Panitikang Testimonial ng Desaparecidos mula sa pagsisikap ng mga kaanak at kaibigan ng mga biktima ng

sapilitang pagkawala o mga desaparecidos na makalikha ng sariling akdang naglalayong ipakilala ang mga biktima. Hindi lamang pagbibigay mukha ang pakay ng mga akdang ibinunga ng mahabang proseso ng paghihintay at paghahanap. Pagtatangka rin ang aklat na ito para basagin ang mga paratang ng pamahalaan laban sa kanila dahil sila bilang mga ama, ina, anak, kapatid, at kaibigan ay may pagkakakilanlang labas sa pagkakakahon ng estado sa kanila sa mga bansag na terorista, kalaban ng pamahalaan at ibang salitang ikinakabit sa mga biktima.” (Meeting in the End: Literary Testimonials of Desaparecidos” was created from the efforts of relatives and friends of victims of forced disappearance or desaparecidos to create their own works aimed at introducing the victims. The purpose of the works that resulted from a long process of waiting and searching is not just to give a face. This book is also an attempt to break the government’s allegations against them because they are fathers, mothers, sons, brothers, and friends and hence, have an identity outside of the state’s labeling of them as terrorists, opponents of the government and other words attached to the victims.)

Filipino cultural critic Rolando B. Tolentino notes that writing for the desaparecidos is more difficult than the usual titles because it requires the families and friends of the disappeared to confront their demons, to write a farewell to a disappeared (who might reappear in the future), to make a confession of sadness. At the forefront of the workshop that gathered these participant-writers in May 2008, Tolentino made this disclosure during the book launching of *Pagtatagpo sa Kabilang Dulo: Panitikang Testimonial ng Desaparecidos*. This was launched

on January 8, 2010 through the combined efforts of Desaparecidos, another national organization of the families of the disappeared and *Pagbutlak*, the official student publication of the University of the Philippines Visayas, College of Arts and Sciences. The book is the product of a series of workshops facilitated by members of Congress of Teachers and Educators for Nationalism and Democracy (CONTEND-UP). Tolentino who also conducted a segment of the workshop claimed that writing helped in processing the trauma of the participants whose loved ones remain missing. The experience was painful but liberating. This compendium of testimonials from the loved ones of the disappeared were tributes to their fallen relative, friend, or comrade in the underground movement (*AFAD Secretariat*). Aside from tributes, the collection also consists of letters, poem, narratives that reveal contradictory emotions ranging from guilt, hopelessness, anger, despair, deep longing, hope, and courage. The contributions made by the participants form part of a good literary collection because these writers write from their hearts.

In this compendium of testimonial works, the correlation between cultural trauma and collective memory is established. The cultural trauma—the objective projection of the horrible experiences of the victims and collective memory—the subjective representations of shared experiences among the surviving relatives of the desaparecidos combine together. Thereafter, cultural trauma gives way to collective memories seeking release through testimonial works. For the cultural trauma to resurfaced once more, the facilitators of the workshop had needed to prick the trauma in the consciousness of the participants. It has to be done in a gradual manner. The workshop required them to escape from the world of reality. They closed their eyes for a moment—and were told to enter the “safe space.” Like a house, it has doors and windows which can allow them to exit if things become too much to

bear. The professors and sociologists collaborated effectively so as to animate their imagination avoiding overbearing instructions because harsh stimuli can threaten them and withdraw from the activity with no results to gather. Roland Tolentino, workshop facilitator from CONTEND-UP assessed the process:

“Art as therapy” ang nilayon ng dalawang workshop na pinagmulan ng marami sa mga akda. Itinaguyod ang malikhaing pagsulat bilang malikhaing proseso ng pagkumpronta, pagkausap sa mga multo, anino’t demonyo, pamamaalam, paninigil, pagtatapat ng dalamhati at paninindigan kung bakit kailangang singilin ang pwersang nagpawala at ang paninidigang na silang iwinala ay hindi naman naglaho nang ganoon-ganoon na lamang. Tunay na mabigat ang dalawang workshops. Sabi nga ng facilitator mula sa health group, dahil wala ang winalang katawan, parating may pangungulila, parating umaasang makakabalik, parating di maubos-ubos ang luha, parating mabigat ang sandali ng pakikipagharap.” (“Art as therapy” is the intention of the two workshops which is the source of many of the works. Creative writing was promoted as a creative process of confronting, talking to ghosts, ghosts, demons, saying goodbye, holding back, confessing grief and affirming why the forces that destroyed must be charged and the dignity that they were denied did not disappear like that. that’s all. The two workshops are really heavy. The facilitator from the health group said, because the lost body is gone, there is always longing, always hoping to return, tears are always endless, the moment of confrontation is always heavy.)

Another facilitator, Rommel Rodriguez who is also from CONTEND-UP, viewed the workshop with two targets:

Una, maging daan ang malikhaing pagsulat sa pagproseso ng alaala at emosyon ng mga pamilya ng mga sapilitang pagkawala. Ikalawa, matapos ang serye ng pagsulat, tipunin ang mga nasulat sa manuskrito para gawing libro...ang antolohiyang ito ang katuparan ng pagsasanib ng panahon, kaalaman at karanasan ng tatlong organisasyon sa nakaraang dalawang taon. (First, creative writing allows families of forced disappearances to process memories and emotions. Second, after the series of writing, gathering what was written in the manuscript to make a book... this anthology is the culmination of the merging of time, knowledge and experience of the three organizations in the past two years.)

The writers and sociologists become the reliable people who went through the difficult process of gradually but steadily leading the participants in revisiting their traumatic past. It was a challenge to make them face their trauma and make them write about it too. The families and friends of desaparecidos were made to confront and relive trauma again. This was done individually because traumatic experience was uniquely different from each other. Yet when they put them together in a pool of collected memories—the shared experiences become familiar and correlated. After all, their collective memories were shaped by a trauma—all caused by a common phenomenon, that is, enforced disappearance. Rodriguez added:

“Mahirap panghawakan at damhin ang marahas na karanasan ng bawat isa. May

bigat kaming naramdaman sa espasyong kumakanlong sa amin. Saan nga ba kami magsisimula? Paano namin uumpisahan ang sesyon? Maging matagumpay kaya kami sa aming mga inilatag na layunin?..Madaling basahin ang kanilang mga sinulat subalit hindi ito ganoon kadaling lumabassakanilang bibig. May pagkakataong nagtatawanan sa mga detalyeng kumikilit sa gunita ng bawat isa. May pumupuslit na galit at dumudurong takot kapag nagsasalaysay ng imahen o pangyayaring di kanais-nais; ang maging saksi sa sapilitang pagdukot sa asawa, anak, at kapatid, ang pagbisita ng nawawalang kaanak sa panaginip, ang tunog ng gatilyo ng baril at mga hampas ta dagok, ang mga sigaw at hagulgol.” (It is difficult to hold and feel each other’s violent experiences. We felt a weight in the space sheltering us. Where do we start? How do we start the session? Can we be successful in our stated goals?.It is easy to read their writings but it is not so easy to come out of their mouths. There is a chance to laugh at the details that tug at each other’s memory. There is sneaking anger and fear when narrating an image or event that is undesirable; to witness the forced abduction of a wife, child, and brother, the visit of a missing relative in a dream, the sound of a gun trigger and blows, the screams and wails.)

An Analysis of First Filipino Testimonial Literature for the Desaparecidos

It is no wonder that every written piece in the workshop deals with a particular structure or pattern. First is the emotional dislocation where they express loss, restlessness, and uncertainty. Then this will be followed by sadness, deep longing,

helplessness. In the end, hope springs in their works, filled with determination to continue the fight in the hope of seeing the missing beloved again. It illustrates too that in the initial stage of writing, trauma is still in the consciousness of the workshop participant. Notably that the best parts of the texts are usually the beginning parts. In the poem by Adora Faye de Vera, she did not mince with words and put:

*Hahanapin kita sa angil ng punglo
Sa tinik ng gubat silahis ng sulo
Ipagtatanong ka sa libong kamao
Sa kaway ng bandera’t dagundong ng maso
(I’ll look for you in the shriek of the hornet
In the thorn of the forest, the torch shines
You will be questioned by a thousand fists
With the wave of the flag and the roar of the mallet)*

This is just the opening stanza and yet this is already complete, clearly expressing her intentions. Full of determination, the persona is bent on finding her beloved even with the impossibility of the search because of the thousand obstructions. Obviously, this is an angry poem, most probably written right after the session with the cultural trauma. However, this is also written in great circumspect as the personal still finds it necessary to consider the mission of the movement. It tries to convey that nothing comes out of a heart consumed by sorrow and hopelessness. This is also the same disposition in the poem by Belet Batralo:

*Matukoy ko lang sana kung nasaan ka na
Nang bangungot sa pagkawala’y matapos na
Pananagutin sino pa man ang may sala
Maniningil, kasama ng sanlakang masa
(I just want to know where you are
When the nightmare of the loss is over
Whoever is at fault will be held accountable
Charges, together with the masses)*

*Kapit-bisig na haharap sa ambang laban
Sa pamahalaan na nagbibingi-bingihan
Pagkat iisa lang, mithiing ipaglaban.
Katarungan at karapatan, hangat na makamtan
(Arm in arm to face the impending battle
To the government that turns a deaf ear
Because there is only one, a dream to fight for.
Justice and rights, always attainable)*

While the family and friends remain in deep moribund in the initial stage of the disappearance, this feeling can be mitigated and in time, the heart and the mind recover. Emotions are overruled by reason. Trauma is abated; memory is placated. The angry consciousness is replaced with a calm and steady collective memory.

In the workshop, the training began with a creation of safe spaces. This is an imaginary space wherein one finds solace. The intention of the facilitator is to let them create a peculiar set of imagery that will be functional for the writing of testimonial literature. A few of these participants came up with a good trope for their safe spaces. Nuki Calubid used a perfect metaphor as her place of retreat:

“Ako ay si Kahon. Naghihintay mahanap at mabuksan. Ako’y nakabalot sa gusto mo. Buksan mo lang ako para mahanap mo ang mga sagot na hinahanap mo. Ang espasyo sa loob ko ay mahalagang bagay para lang sa iyo. Pwede mo akong itago o kaya’y ipamahagi sa iba. Ingatan mo ako na hindi magamit sa masama. Kapag tapos mo na akong gamitin, sarahan mo ako at ibalot na muli. Ilagay mo ako sa lugar kung saan mo ako natagpuan. Sana maging kapaki-pakinabang ang mga nakuha mo sa akin at maging masaya ka. Pwede mo akong gamitin muli. Hanapin m lang at matatagpuan mo ako.” (I am Kahon. Waiting to be found and opened. I am

wrapped in what you want. Just open me up to find the answers you’re looking for. The space inside me is precious just for you. You can hide me or share it with others. Keep me from being used for evil. When you’re done using it, close it and wrap it up again. Put me where you found me. I hope what you got from me will be useful and you will be happy. You can use me again. Just look for me and you will find me.)

This sanctuary chosen by Calubid compares to the “Third Space” by Homi K. Bhabha (1994). Bhabha describes it as a transition space with enables hybrid identifications where new things, even the impossible ones, come in existence. The box is analogous to the “Third Space” which is a liminal space “which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.” In this “in-between” space, new cultural identities are formed, reformed, and constantly in a state of becoming. Calubid said this is the answer for all the problems beleaguering them: *“Buksan mo lang ako para mahanap mo ang mga sagot na hinahanap mo. Ang espasyo sa loob ko ay mahalagang bagay para lang sa iyo. Pwede mo akong itago o kaya’y ipamahagi sa iba.”*

In Romy Ancheta’s metaphor for safe space, he used “tahanan” –indeed a haven for our a family who longs for affection, retreat, peace, togetherness, and assurance, He wrote:

“Bilang bahay, nais o sana laging masaya at puno ng buhay, kumpleto ang pamilyang naninirahan. Walang problema, walang gulo, walang kinatatakutan. Masayang pamilya. Punong pagmamahalan. Walang pangambang magkakahiwa-hiwalay. Malungkot kapag nawala o kulang ang namamahay. Lalong malungkot kung wala na ang naninirahan.”

(As a house, we want or hope to always be happy and full of life, the living family is complete. No problem, no mess, no fear. Happy family. Full of love. There is no fear of falling apart. It is sad when the living is lost or missing. It's especially sad when the resident is gone.)

To sum, the compendium of testimonial writings for desaparecidos contains that reverberating message that each one of the writer-contributors echo—justice. The disappearance of their beloved has not in a way dampen their enthusiasm to continue the search and pursue the fight for justice. The cultural trauma is far from being removed in their consciousness. The families and friends of the desaparecidos have even deliberately relived the traumatic past so as to sustain themselves with motivation to continue the fight. Belet Batralo wrote a fierce and heartfelt memorial tribute for brother Cesar who was abducted in December 21, 2006. The ending of this memorial piece still bears the pain, disappointment, and rage which are the usual reactions of someone in cultural trauma.

“Nasaan na ang magiting naming kapatid? Siya na ang nasa isip ay kapakanan ng masa, halos wala ng itinira para sa sarili niya at buong buhay niya ay ibinuhos sa pakikibaka laban sa mapagsamantala. Subalit ang luha pala ay hindi sapat; hindi matitinag ng luha ang mga walang kaluluwang kumuha sa kapatid ko. Huwag nilang akalaing natapos an ang laban ng kuya ko; dahil isang pagkakamali na taniman nila ng galit sa puso ang lahi ng kuya ko; dahil sumibol ang pagsigaw sa katarungan. Hindi doon matatapos ang pakikibaka, dadalhin namin ang laban sa lansangan man o kabundukan. Itataas ko ang kamao ko bilang hudyat ng pakikibaka at paghahanap

ng hustisya para sa kapatid ko at iba pang biktima ng sapilitang pagkawala.” (Where is our brave brother? He who had in mind the welfare of the masses, had almost nothing left for himself and poured his whole life into the struggle against the exploiter. But tears are not enough; the soulless ones who took my brother cannot be moved by tears. Don't let them think that my brother's fight is over; because it was a mistake that they planted hatred in the heart of my brother's race; because the cry for justice arose. The struggle will not end there, we will take the fight to the streets or the mountains. I will raise my fist as a sign of struggle and seeking justice for my brother and other victims of enforced disappearance.)

The writings in the collection of works comprising the testimonial literature for desaparecidos culled from the bereaved family and friends bear the stamp of cultural trauma. As postulated by Jeffrey Alexander, cultural trauma must be deeply felt profoundly leaving indelible marks upon the group's consciousness. (Alexander 2004, p.11) The horrendous events surrounding the disappearance cannot be just obliterated from the consciousness of these participants who were asked to relieve the trauma during the workshop. Writer Dee Ayroso put that feeling into words. Her rage for the disappearance of her husband in 2002 is no let up:

“At mas lalong walang dahilan ngayon para sumuko. Lahat naman tayo mamamatay, ang mahalaga ay para kanino mo ginugol ang buhay mo, sagot niya sa akin kapag nag-aalala ako. At halos walong taon na akong nag-aalala. Kailangan pa bang sabihin kung gaano ko kamahal si Honor at paano ako nilalamon ng lungkot sa pangungulila sa halos walong taong wala siya? Ang mas

mahalaga, kung nasaan man si Honor at si Johnny ngayon, ang tanging konsolasyon ko ay alam kong handa siya sa anumang kasaspitan, o kinasapitan nila. Hindi siya susuko. Hindi kami susuko. At hindi rin kami magkakahiwalay.” (And now there is no reason to give up. We all die, the important thing is who you spent your life for, he answered me when I was worried. And I’ve been worried for almost eight years. Do I need to say how much I love Honor and how the sadness of missing her for almost eight years is consuming me? More importantly, wherever Honor and Johnny are now, my only consolation is that I know he is ready for whatever comes his way, or they do. He will not give up. We will not give up. And we will not be separated either.)

Being the writer that Dee Ayroso is, the rhetoric in her testimonial works for Honor Ayroso is simple yet rousing. Her final words on the disappearance of Honor is very memorable: *“Hindi siya susuko. Hindi kami susuko. At hindi rin kami magkakahiwalay.”* Even if nine years has passed in the time of this writing, the fire in her writing is never lost. However, one can also see hope in her writing. Her works always end with expectant words. In her published letter for Honor, she put:

“Pero nandito pa rin ako at nagsisikap magsilbing liwanag, sa munti mang paraan ay nagbibigay-tanglaw sa katotohanan na pumupunit sa dilim, kasama ang iba pang tulad natin, mga sulo ng bayan na di mauubos ang liwanag sa pagsasama-sama. Kahit pa napawalay ka, at posibleng kasama na rin sa mga tinupok ng mga demonyo sa dilim, nagsisilbi kang gatong at inspirasyon sa akin as sa ating mga munting ningas-apoy. Alam kong kapag tumingala ako sa gabi, makikita

pa rin kita, habang nagbibigay-tanglaw kas mula sa itim na kalangitan, kasama ng iba pang mga sulo na naging mga tala na ang liwanag ay tumatagos sa walang hanggan. (But I’m still here and I’m trying to serve as a light, in a small way, shining a light on the truth that tears through the darkness, along with others like us, torches of the people whose light will never run out when we come together. Even though you are separated, and possibly among those consumed by the demons in the dark, you serve as fuel and inspiration to me as to our little flames. I know that when I look up at night, I will still see you, shining a light from the black sky, along with other torches that have become records whose light penetrates eternity)

The first collection of testimonial writings for desaparecidos comes from the family and friends who wrote for their missing loved ones. They are peculiarly different from literary works that we are familiar with because each has a story to tell. Before these bereaved family and friends were made to write, there were oral histories that were asked of them to revisit. Cultural trauma is the necessary impetus to propel them to write. The traumatic past is a stimulus that fires their imagination to craft powerful verses, that gives them the motivation to pen the story that needs telling, that affords release of pent-up emotions in the form of a poem, letter, character sketch, anecdote, and legend. Yet, the stimulus to write is just half of the whole process. To render them aesthetically or to give an artistic form to them is the other half of what entails to create the first testimonial literature for the desaparecidos. If cultural trauma provides the stimulus, the collective memory provides them the creativity to make the texts truly an artistic writing. In the gathering of the bereaved family and friends, there happens the shared recollection of memories, knowledge, and

information that is significantly associated with their group's identity. (Wertsch and Roediger, 2008). In the workshop facilitated for the family and friends of desaparecidos, the collective memory is the calm retrospect of the past. Even if the recollection dwells and may consist of ugly reminders, collective memory entails steady and low-key revisiting of the past.

The testimonial literature culled from the workshop can be described as "emergent" since they are first attempts in the writing process. These are works that can still be honed and perfected in due time. The form requires more attention because there are still lot of possibilities and improvements that can be done to these writings if time is given to restructure them. If testimonial literature is done under no duress, the plot can be made more exciting, the narrative engaging, poetic lines more polished, the myth and legend more folkloric, and the character sketches more vivid with proper motivation. On the other hand, this book is ground-breaking because of the dearth in the production of memorial literature in the Philippines much more literature for the desaparecidos. In that regard, these authors should be lauded instead because the testimonial works in this compendium are a pioneering work from non-writers whose intention is to memorialize their disappeared family or friend lest they be forgotten.

Edita Burgos clearly put the intention of the book *Pagtatagpo sa Kabilang Dulo: Panitikang Testimonial ng Desaparecidos*. She wrote it in the poem titled "Prime of Freedom":

*"Let it be," He whispers
"Not yet is it your vespers.
I am with you all the time.
It is indeed you prime."*

*Do not flee beloved
I am He, can't you see?
Yes. He who loves me
Is setting me free*

It surprises many why the family and friends of the desaparecidos continue the fruitless search for their beloved considering the years or decades since their disappearance. If these desaparecidos could only say their final words to them, most likely they would have said "enough" already. But the thing is, the bereaved family and friends are not ready to give up. The persona in the poem, Edita begs his son not to "flee" because he is young and in the prime of his life. She appeals Jonas to stay because she will continue looking for him. And she will not stop. Edita leaves up to our Creator the time she will stop from the mission of finding Jonas. Only *"He who loves me is setting me free."* It means this is a lifetime mission she delegates to herself for son Jonas and for all desaparecidos.

The intention of the family and friends involved in the publication of Philippines' first testimonial literature is primarily to perpetuate the memories of their desaparecidos. Emergent the writings may be, but the book *Pagtatagpo sa Kabilang Dulo: Panitikang Testimonial ng Desaparecidos*. is a repository of the collective memories of the family and friends who never stop looking and hoping to find the disappeared. The book also is a reminder to the perpetrators of enforced disappearance, that there is no stopping them. The collective group is more vigilant now than ever. And for as long as there are still cases of enforced disappearances, the collectivity is a force to reckon with.

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