

# INTRODUCTION

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This issue is eclectic in that the articles traverse diverse sites of contention even as these sites are home to discursive engagements that intensely preoccupy today's citizen. The topics include national and world events and the texts studied include not only the usual literary texts but also the not-so-usual such as textbooks and prison narratives. Nonetheless, common threads connect the articles giving their respective discourses several viewing angles with resulting unexpected representations.

Three interconnected threads link these articles: history and trauma, language and politics and urban cultures. Modern history is often punctuated by acts of violence committed by one community against another, one country against another, or a country against its own people. Trauma, a psychological and medical term, has been appropriated to explain the nature and effects of state and institutional violence committed against the weak, the poor, the dispossessed and the disadvantaged. It has started to be seen as a people's wound inflicted by ideological impositions on a community that has to be mastered or contained.

Trauma studies has underscored how historical traumatic experiences affect not only states and nations as political institutions but more so the ordinary citizen who bears the brunt of death and loss. Moreover, even if the violence has ended, the suffering of the victims continues since the memories remain and often remain unprocessed. Soshana Felman cites the fact that victims deal not only with "memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through its completion, has no end, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect" (69). Cathy Caruth notes in her seminal work that trauma has repercussions, e.g. amnesia, denial, that can affect not just individuals

but entire communities. Historical trauma, which can continue for decades or even centuries, destabilizes a people's psyche.

In recent times, the most significant historical trauma experienced by the Filipino nation is Martial Law. In 1972, Marcos declared Martial Law to control restiveness and eliminate the alleged lawless elements that are causing it. But Martial Law became the means by which the state suppressed constitutional freedoms and, for Marcos, rule the country in a dictatorship that lasted almost two decades.

Monica Macansantos in her article "Historical Amnesia, Colonial Trauma and Self Immolation in Ninotchka Rosca's *State of War*" explores the connection between the present trauma of Martial Law and that of the colonial past, suggesting the co-optation of the privileged by the politically powerful, turning the formerly colonized into agents of oppression and exploitation sometimes worse than the colonial masters. The study explains that as in all forms of trauma, the victims experience denial and amnesia, thus the necessity for strengthening political awareness and the gathering of resistance. Martial Law destroyed a generation and continue to do so through historical erasure which the characters resist by surviving the violence and staying faithful to the cause.

Historical revisionism that leads to the rewriting of Martial Law history is revealed in Maxine Rafaella Rodriguez's "(Re)Writing the 'New Society': A Multimodal Analysis of Marcos' Presidencies in Two Revisions of *Philippines: Our Land and Heritage*." The article examines two editions of a Philippine history textbook. Using the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis, the article does a linguistic analysis of the rendition of Martial Law as a historical period. It reveals the disparity between the unfavorable depiction in the first edition which was published still within the public euphoria brought about by the EDSA People Power Revolution and the second edition which already showed signs of the amnesia resulting from the trauma as it depicts Martial Law in friendlier terms. The study proves the mediated nature of history and how it is dependent on who is writing it and when and where it is being written. Here, language does not lie.

Even the poem "Sunshine" by Vyxx Vasquez speaks of another and more recent Philippine trauma created by another president, Duterte's war on drugs. In the poem, "a young chick paces/its casket-stage,"

indicating the wake of a victim of Operation Tokhang. In Filipino tradition, a chick is placed on the glass top of a coffin to signify the search for justice. Like Martial Law, Duterte's war on drugs has caused the deaths of thousands, a trauma that still continues to torment the nation, inevitably affecting the stability of the Filipino psyche.

After independence, the Philippines launched into serious nation building, accumulating and putting together resources that will be needed for national development. Among the casualties of this national aggression are the indigenous communities and their ancestral lands. Jean Aaron de Borja's "The Sins and Sons of Dimas: Spatial Histories in Vicente Garcia Groyon's *The Sky Over Dimas*" interrogates the destruction of the Maghats, an indigenous community in the island of Negros, by big landowners who wanted to dedicate agriculture to cash crops for industrial ventures. The main character suffers from insanity not just because of personal issues but also metaphorically as a punitive articulation of class guilt. He too is an indirect victim of his forefathers' violence. The plight of the Maghats, as the article shows, became buried history, destined to be an amnesiac absence from mainstream history. The article uses the discourse of space to reveal history's complicity in preferring the capital to the provincial and the elimination of the dispensable in the interest of national development. The disappearance of the Maghats contribute to the historical trauma of the indigenous desaparecidos, a proof of a country's violence against its own.

Nor Faridah Abdul Manaf and Farizah Mari's "Women's Prison Literature: Silenced in Times of Peace and War" locates the experience of historical trauma in world events. Examining the prison narratives of Malaysian and Palestinian female prisoners, the article posits two kinds of trauma: the social and the political. Malaysian female prisoners buckle under the lack of female agency in the context of social and religious expectations. Malaysian female prisoners commit crimes of passion and drug related offenses signifying their inability to carry the burden of gender and class presumptions of success. The disempowerment of these women is a violence in itself and the prison simply concretizes this trauma. The second half of the article focuses on Palestinian female prisoners, their lives a stage for institutional and political violence against a people. Israel is seen as a cruel invader which

not only dispossessed the Palestinians but also made them prisoners in their own country, destroying lives and claiming property, separating families and controlling population movement. The female prisoners were tortured and raped, and bereft of hope, they turn to religion or extremism. Palestinian historical trauma continues to the present, foretelling a future generation that is broken.

The second thread, language and politics, comes in the wake of efforts to define Filipino identity through language and literature. The resurgence of nationalism in the 1960s brought about a new awareness towards being a Filipino and a realization of how mainstream language and literature has unduly marginalized many aspects of Filipino culture. Benigno Montemayor's "Building the Nation with Words" examines the creation of new words in the Filipino language and raises the issue of lack of inclusivity in its formation. He cites the *Salitaan ng Taon*, a project of the Filipinas Institute of Translation, that culls new words in Filipino. He also mentions the inclination to include words from technology and popular culture to the detriment of words from the regional languages that may have wider usage. If building a language is a way of building a nation, then linguistically, there may be something eschewed about the resulting nation.

From language, the issue is taken to the field of literature in Michael Carlos Villas' "New Criticism and the Writing of Contemporary Waray Poetry". The study historicizes the use of New Criticism as a literary paradigm and its impact on the writing of Waray poetry. New Criticism, brought home by the *Tiempos* from the United States, became influential in the writing of Philippine literature, especially Philippine literature in English, in the 1950s-60s. Many of the writers of that generation saw the benefits of New Criticism, especially its attention to craft and its use of textual analysis. However, it was also admittedly unfair to local and popular literature whose conventions and cultural contexts are different from the American literary standard. Resistance to it saw the condemnation of its practitioners but Villas' argument is that it was never accepted hook, line and sinker and was instead appropriated and localized. Citing the works of Edith Tiempo, the movement began by Merlie Alunan and the works of Waray poets, the article interrogates the prejudice against New Criticism by showing how

its concern for craft simply supplemented the indigenous elements already inherent in Waray poetry. It contests the idea of the New Criticism hegemony and valorizes the critical use of it by the Waray poets. The alleged literary colonialism of New Criticism was never completed, instead it was perhaps indigenized to suit the purposes of the Waray poets.

The last thread expresses the issues and concerns of urban life. Urban literary studies often looks at a megapolis as a dystopia, a dehumanizing product of capitalistic greed and self-oriented values. The city is imagined as a tapestry of hostile streets and indifferent citizens, a non-place where a *genus loci* does not exist. But it is Janus-faced, it has an irresistible lure to those who want to live comfortable lives. While it is a non-place, it is nevertheless a center of activity and energy that can be seductive to the senses and the intellect. Thus, the city can be a liminal entity that one can either love or hate.

This liminality is traced by Oscar Serquiña in his insightful study of the poetry of Isabelita Orlina Reyes titled “A City Like No Other: Urban Representation and Metropolitan Mentalities in Isabelita Orlina Reyes’ *In Transitives*.” The study mentions poems depicting Metro Manila which at first glance, seem unsympathetic to the huge chaotic city. The poems seem to prove that living in Manila is an inescapable yoke. In addition, the poems adopt a middle class attitude that minds the city’s noise, filth and disorder. But Serquiña provides intuitive comments regarding this discursive turn. He does not condemn the perspective of the poet and instead tries to understand the need to be distant and disengaged because in reality, the persona is hopelessly entangled in the quotidian complexity of the city. The persona needs to be in the city, it is a chosen place, but it is a space that be occupied only through tough negotiations done on a daily basis. Any denizen of Metro Manila will understand the anxiety.

If Manila is the typical city of the Global South, Hong Kong is the showcase of Asian economic progress where order and civility can be expected. It is an icon of urban commerce, its eyes trained towards global financial significance and stability. Dennis Haskell in his examination of the poems of Shirley Geok-lin Lim in “Perfection Forbidden: Shirley Geok-lin Lim in Hong Kong” looks at the city’s current face. He mentions

the Hong Kong mall in “Mall Ballad” with reference to *Lyrical Ballads*. While the latter praises the grandeur and inspiring quality of the natural world, the mall becomes what is natural in urbanized Hong Kong. The poems render the city as cosmopolitan but it is simultaneously commercial and individualistic. There is an implicit search for humanity and spiritual redemption in Hong Kong’s metal structures. The second collection of poems provides an answer to that. In *Angel Wings*, the other soul of Hong Kong surfaces and this is seen in the students’ pro-democracy marches. Again the liminal element emerges, as if telling the reader that a city cannot be essentialized.

In conclusion, the articles in this issue speak of the current. The issues are not exactly new but they are given a contemporary dealing and theoretical treatment that show them in a new light. Re-visioning is an urgent task in scholarship and these articles fulfil this task well.

#### WORKS CITED

- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Felman, Soshana and Dori Laub. *Testimony. Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychology and History*. Routledge, 1992.