VOICING RESISTANCE: TESTIMONIAL NARRATIVES OF THE FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF THE DISAPPEARED

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Enforced disappearances have been deployed as a strategy of terror and tension against dissenting voices even in so-called democratic societies. They are aimed to suppress and harass individuals and groups, as well as their families, friends, and sympathizers, situated in oppositional politics. One of the pedagogical tools of resistance against such forms of hegemony is testimonial literature. Using thematic analysis, this paper problematizes testimonial writings of the families and loved ones of desaparecidos (the disappeared). Among the dominant themes are the struggle of memory against forgetting, the sense of sufferance and sacrifice, and the discourse of solidarity. Their discussion is likewise predicated on the notions of countermemory and counternarratives. This paper recommends the retrieval of such alternative social/cultural practices to resurrect "subjugated knowledges" and challenge hegemonic assumptions about history and society.

Introduction: Disappearance as Scare Tactic

ENFORCED OR INVOLUNTARY DISAPPEARANCES CONSTITUTE A MECHANISM USED BY APPARATUSES OF THE STATE to silence and terrorize individuals and groups that situate themselves within a progressive, 'leftist,' and oppositional politics. They were first used in Nazi Germany, and later adopted by the military and authoritarian regimes of Latin America to silence and harass alleged subversives and destabilizers. According to Article II of the International Convention on Enforced Disappearance, enforced disappearance means:

> Any act or omission which is designed to conceal the whereabouts of a political opponent or dissident, of whose fate his family, friends or supporters are unaware, and which is committed with intent to suppress, prevent or impede opposition or dissidence, by persons in government office, by government officials at any level or by organized groups of private individuals acting with the support or permission of the foregoing. (Secretariat of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues 1986, 36)

Enforced disappearance, in other words, is different from simple abduction in that there always exists a political element, a motive on the part of the abductors to harass not only the victims but also their families and political groups. Enforced disappearance may be characterized as the flagrant infringement of: 1) "the right recognition everywhere as a person before the law"; 2) "the right to legal defense"; 3) "the right not to be subjected to torture"; and 4) "the right to life because the victim is at the mercy of her/his captor" (FIND 1998, 12).

In the Philippines, such political tactic has been used since the tumultuous martial law period, according to most accounts, by the military establishment or its civilian sympathizers/organizations to discourage any form of resistance to the government. According to FIND or the Families of the Victims of Involuntary Disappearance, an organization that records human rights abuses including disappearances, martial law served as the perfect pretext for disappearances, which "were used as a preferred technique to eliminate the opponents and to discourage protest from the people as a whole" (FIND 1998, 6).

Initially glorified as a new chapter in the nation's history, Marcos's ouster in 1986 through the so-called EDSA People Power Revolution, however, did not put a stop to the disappearances and other abuses by the military, the police, or their civilian components. During the six years of Corazon Aquino as Marcos's successor, there was "no let-up in the occurrence of different forms of human rights violations, including involuntary disappearances" (FIND 1998, 9)—all indicating that the 1986 urban insurrection, as Epifanio San Juan, Jr. (2000, 265) has called it, did not effect any radical changes, contrary to what most people had expected. The euphoria that welcomed the Aquino regime turned into dismay early on because of the Mendiola Massacre and the murder of social activists and labor leaders associated with the organized left. Furthermore, FIND claims that there were as many as 830 cases of involuntary disappearance during the first half-a-dozen years after EDSA (FIND 1998, 9). After Aquino and until 2006 during the time of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, there were approximately 200 recorded cases of involuntary disappearance, and the number seems to be growing (FIND 2006, 7).

Resistance and Countermemory

My framework for discussion includes the notion of counter-memory as explicated primarily by Michel Foucault. Counter-memory refers to "a process of reading particular events against the grain of hegemonic histories; counter-memory assigns an active role to the reader/critic in the interpretation of history rather than a passive viewing role" (Pison 2005, 1). The deployment of counter-

memory in cultural studies destabilizes and interrogates further the "ontological objectivity" of history, as well as its discourse which, as Foucault points out in his writings, is inextricably bound up with the issue of power. Counter-memory is connected to Foucault's notion of genealogy which posits struggles and conflicts involving erudite, homogeneous/homogenizing discourses on the on hand, and local, illegitimate, and subjugated discourses on the other (ibid., 7). Among the latter are those knowledges that are occluded or buried, whose speaking subjects are not supposed to be knowledgeable, for which reason they remain in the margins. Among them are women, workers, prisoners (political or otherwise), and psychiatric patients. Foucault explains and critiques this phenomenon further with his notion of "regimes of truth":

> Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function to distinguish true from false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are saying what counts as true. (In May 1993, 83)

Testimonial Writings as Counternarratives and the Problematization of History

Testimonios (testimonies) refer to the body of grassroots writings in the form of letters, diary entries, eyewitness accounts, verses, and life stories that, unlike most autobiographies and biographies, are written or narrated by people from marginalized sectors of society (De Guzman 2008, 605). One of its paradigmatic examples is the book entitled Mi Llamo Rigoberta Menchu, which is about a poor, indigenous Guatemalan woman whose family was harassed by the state and its military. Her testimonio, written with Elisabeth Debray, brought to the attention of a great number of people, including international organizations, the cases of human rights abuses against the people of Guatemala. Rigoberta's own family suffered terribly in the hands of military for alleged anti-government activities: Her mother was raped and murdered, and her brother and father were tortured and slain.

John Beverly, an authority on testimonial literature, maintains that given its egalitarian and demotic character, the testimonio approximates the "popular democratic" simulacrum of the epic narrative (Beverly 2004, 33). Centering on the exploits of heroes and heroines possessed of supernatural powers, epic narratives on the one hand have been associated with a mythic national identity as personified

by their protagonists, invoked at times in the canonical discourse of nationalism. On the other hand, testimonios focus on the otherwise ignored stories from the peripheries. Whereas epic narratives foreground supposedly heroic feats, testimonial writings call attention to shared experiences of oppression and marginality.

Testimonial narratives assume the character of counternarratives since they challenge and interrogate "official" and "hegemonic" stories aimed at controlling public consciousness by propagating "a set of common cultural ideals" and bleach the institutions of colonialism/patriarchy/capitalism of their dark legacies (Giroux et al. 1991, 2). These counternarratives are "little stories of individuals and groups whose knowledges and histories have been marginalized, subjugated and forgotten in the telling of official narratives" (ibid.). Such narratives broaden the range of texts that constitute the politics of representation—a universe of "different ethical, political, and aesthetic perspectives which are based on incommensurable premises—a heterogeneity of different moral language games" (ibid., 3).

Testimonial literature may be linked to recent efforts in the field of cultural studies to criticize history/historiography. The traditional description of history as a reflection of past events has of late fallen into disrepute, especially with the postmodern/poststructural engagement with what Paul Ricoer calls the "hermeneutics of suspicion," and the entextualization/emplotment/narrativization of the past through history have been problematized in more ways than one. Edel Garcellano (in Pison 2005, 11) critiques conventional historiography's privileging of linearity, its representations of historical events in which "order is a platoon formation and progress, the cadence of martial music."

Testimonial narratives, however, do not simply give voice to the marginalized. Such writings also challenge, undermine, and circumvent modernist literary aesthetics, which in the main privileges the author or writer as the source of "truth," or as the purveyor of "creative ideas." It is still traditional/canonical literature, and with it, traditional/canonical authorship, that carry currency in spite of the supposed democratization of the politics of representation. This conceptualization of the author, of course, is one that is bound up with the liberal humanist idealization of the individual as autonomous. As a genre, testimonial writings lie outside the traditional cultural/literary grid and rub against the grain of literature itself. Abdul JanMohammed and David Lloyd (1990, 7) explain, "One must always keep in mind that the universalizing humanist project has been highly selective, systematically valorizing certain texts and authors as the humanist tradition while ignoring or actively repressing alternative traditions and attitudes."

It may be difficult to characterize testimonial narratives using the categories of traditional literature. I agree to Carolyn Hutchinson's (2010, 3) suggestion that the testimonio should not be considered as a literary genre but as a mode of consciousness—that is, as a cultural form responding to the conditions of otherity or marginality. I would like to add that the testimonio should be classified more specifically as a praxis-oriented mode of consciousness to highlight further its transformative and emancipatory character anchored on agenda that originate from a marginalized group and are critical of the status quo.

This paper will show how the stories written by the relatives of desaparecidos resurrect/insurrect subjugated discourses and knowledges. These narratives interrogate and problematize some of the notions about history and society, which are promoted by both repressive and ideological state apparatuses such as the military establishment, the media, and the academe. One of these common notions is the supposed restoration of democratic institutions after the "revolution" of 1986. That the cases of involuntary disappearance continue to rise after "People Power," and that little has been done to prosecute their perpetrators are enough to shatter some of our sanctified beliefs about democratization after Marcos and the promise of a better life after the dictatorship.

This modest undertaking may well represent a "reterritorialization of literary studies" (Patajo-Legasto 1993, 47) since it uses as primary materials narratives that exemplify a sort of minority literature on account of their critical subject position. The term minority literatures, according to Priscelina Patajo-Legasto (ibid., 49), refers to "writings that have been excluded from the Philippine literary canon for reasons that are not always 'aesthetic' in nature, but political and economic." Nonetheless, they collectively serve as a most formidable challenge to the "hegemonic (Americanized) Philippine culture" (ibid.). These testimonial writings can also constitute literatures from the margins providing "alternative visions, alternative cultural modes of production that prefigure the structures of a better social order" (ibid., 43). Such literatures are critical articulations of alternative practices and values in what Homi Bhabha calls "interstitial zones."

In analyzing the testimonios as counternarratives, I do not intend to critique them on the basis of truth value, or of how disparate these narratives are, as compared with "official" (i.e., government) accounts. Instead, the reading (and this academic exercise as a whole) is treated as a praxis-oriented strategy against hegemony—that is, generally speaking, the arbitrary limiting effects of coercive/repressive institutions and the ideological formations through which they are sustained.

I am also citing the notion of minority discourse as explained by JanMohamed and Lloyd inasmuch as the victims of the disappearances and their families make up a minority not in terms of number but with regard to their position vis-à-vis the dispositifs of political power and knowledge. The testimonial narratives bring together "disparate voices in a common forum" in order to:

> highlight what should already be the case: that those who despite their marginalization, in fact constitute the majority should be able to collectively examine the nature and content of their common marginalization and to develop strategies for their empowerment. (JanMohamed and Lloyd 1990, 1-2)

This minority discourse, it has been pointed out, is the product of damage which has been "more or less systematically inflicted on cultures produced as minorities by the dominant cultures" (ibid., 4). Recalling Foucault's problematization of counter-memory, the control of memory and history, according to JanMohamed and Lloyd, represents "one of the gravest forms of damage" (ibid., 7). Therefore, the minority should always guard themselves, through critical subject positionalities against the reproduction and, more so, against the possibility of themselves reproducing dominant ideologies. That is, the discourse of the minority, informed by these critical positions, should serve as counter-discourse in relation to the discourse of hegemony, and testimonial writings, I would argue, exemplify a minority discourse that is critical of prevailing ideologies and prefigure alternatives to dominant dispensation. Furthermore, the metonymic character of testimonios (an "absent polyphony of voices" according to John Beverly 1993, 75) squares with another description of minority discourse as utterances reflective of "community usage rather than simply being individuated" (Rosaldo 1990, 124). In other words, it is not just empathic identification, but the spirit of solidarity and collective dissent that characterizes testimonial writings.

Materials and Research Questions

The testimonial narratives that were used in this paper have all been published in two books. One is entitled Pagtatagpo sa Kabilang Dulo: Panitikang Testimonyal ng Desaparecidos published by the Amado V. Hernandez Resource Center in 2008. It is a compilation of more or less 120 testimonial narratives (in both prose and poetic forms) written by members of Desaparecidos, which, like FIND, is composed of the families, relatives, and friends of victims of involuntary disappearance. A desultory survey of the materials would reveal that majority of the narratives relate to the Marcos / martial law period in the Philippines. However, there are also narratives about human rights violations during the period under

Aquino and Arroyo. The prefatory notes indicate that some of the writings are the products of workshops sponsored by Desaparecidos as therapeutic sessions for the bereaved families and loved ones. I am excluding these workshop products from my analysis because of possible questions about mediation. Likewise, I skipped the narratives written by the disappeared themselves since my concern is the writings of their families and friends.

The other book, Beyond Disappearance: Chronicles of Courage published in 2006 by FIND, is more varied in terms of form. It is a compilation not only of testimonial writings, but also of biographies, news reports, and journalistic essays about the seemingly never-ending search for the victims. Some of the articles document the efforts of the families and sympathetic organizations to locate the disappeared. I have chosen only the testimonial writings for my study.

It may also be instructive to point out at this juncture the political dynamics embedded in the materials, as the groups that published the books belong to different hues of the organized left. Desparecidos (let alone, the AVHRC which published one of the two primary materials) is associated with the bigger "Reaffirmist" faction which has reaffirmed (hence, the label) the national-democratic strategy for revolution as expounded on by Jose Ma. Sison, founding chair of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

FIND, on the other hand, which is older than Desparecidos, seems to follow the "Rejectionist" line that is pulling the revolutionary base back to the urban proletariat. One can, therefore, notice that some of the narratives are arbitrated by these partisan codes. It is not the aim of the paper, nonetheless, to pit these codes against each other, but rather against the master discourses of the state and the military establishment. Overall, despite their being informed by seemingly conflicting and conflicted political lines, I submit that the materials used for this paper constitute discursive strategies of dissent. The nuances of doctrinal lines are not a concern of my discussion.

Through thematic analysis, it is the aim of this paper to answer the following questions: As counternarratives and countermemories, in what ways do the narratives challenge hegemonic or established notions of/about history and society? How is resistance—one that combines the languages of critique and possibility—foregrounded in the narratives? What alternatives are proferred? How is the discourse of solidarity deployed and what collective concerns are highlighted?

Memory versus Forgetting

Primarily, what can be gleaned from the narratives is the struggle of memory against forgetting, the desire to keep alive and burning as it were the memories of the desaparecidos notwithstanding the overwhelming possibility of death in the hands of their abductors—a psychological, if symbolic, mechanism to cope with the sense of bereavement. It is noticeable that many of the narratives are about the commemoration of important occasions, primarily birthdays and anniversaries, as illustrated in the following passages:

> Surely without you, I cannot celebrate grandiosely the ninth year of our togetherness? What for? I cannot light a dinner candle for two and embrace you tightly. This night will be cold.... ("Wedding Anniversary" in Pagtatagpo, 48)

> It is your birthday today. It is odd to be celebrating your birthday in your absence....You must wonder why I would recount this one moment I had with you on your birthday and in front of so many people. I am doing this because with this triviality I can grasp just a little bit of your essence, of what makes you tick, of who you are. This is just an effort on my part to understand what you represent.... ("For Luisa Dominado Posa" in Pagtatagpo, 64)

In this context, birthdays may be strongly emblematic of the desire to resurrect or disinter the desaparecidos, or to make them continue living, birth being the categorical opposite of death or disappearance. It seems to be a symbolic way of wresting the disappeared from the clutches of death, even if a tragic end seems to be their ineluctable fate in the hands of their abductors. The narratives probe the division between life and death, with the living and the dead seemingly infusing each other with courage and strength of character to engage the enemy.

Vividly remembered are the desaparecidos' acts of kindness, their remarkable character as parents, siblings, or children. The theme bears an affinity to the idea that memory is selective, that it is "not one seamless homogeneous whole, but is crisscrossed by conflict, manifested in what is remembered and what is not" (Serbin 2006, 234):

> He always reminded us how lucky we were to have enough food than (sic) most children who can't afford to have a decent meal....I remember when we had a heated argument about people living in the slums while others live in luxurious condominiums. Like many "privileged" individuals, I called those impoverished people lazy,

> which is the reason for their poverty. Papa made me think it was not that simple.... As I grow older and witness the realities of life and society, I always remember Papa. ("Prudencio Calubid: The Best Father a Child Could Have" in Pagtatagpo, 180)

It is no wonder then that the narratives evince indignation and disbelief that their loved ones had to be forcibly taken:

> He doesn't deserve to be abducted only because he's an activist.... (He is) a man whose only desire is to save and protect his people from the unjust, from the abusive, from the wicked, from this corrupt government. ("Vignettes on James" in Pagtatagpo, 108)

In some instances, the disappearance is pictured as an unwelcome rupture, an abrupt and stealth invasion of a family's private space and daily routine. The material consequence of the abduction on the part of the family becomes too hard to endure, especially if the desparecido is the breadwinner, thus putting the family's very existence at risk. The loss of a father, for instance, especially in the case of families lacking middle class security, is the loss of financial means as well. Also, it is not surprising that the children of the disappeared are the ones most affected emotionally; traumatized by the disappearance of their parents, they bear the onus or stigma associated with having activist-parents:

> Bigo ako at halos bagsak na ang katawan. Hindi ko na kaya. Isa pa'y wala na kaming makakain, at ubos na sa kabebenta ang mga gamit ko. [I have failed and my body is already weak. I can't do it anymore. Also, we have nothing to eat, and our possessions have all been sold.] ("Saulo" in Pagtatagpo, 200; translation mine)

> Mahirap mawalan ng asawa. Laging hinahanap ang mga bata ng kanilang ama. Yung panganay ko ay sandaling nagrebelde at nabarkada, ayaw nang pumasok dahil na rin sa tromang inabot niya sa pagigig saksi sa dahas ng pagdukot sa sariling ama at ang di na pagbalik nito sa mahabang panahon. [It is tough to lose a spouse. The kids are always looking for their father. Our eldest even rebelled for a time and no longer wanted to attend school because of the trauma he got from witnessing his father's abduction.] ("Obet" in Pagtatagpo, 249; translation mine)

> Where is Romy? I lay awake many a night asking the same question over and over again. I would stare at the ceiling as if I could find the answer there. I prayed for sleep that would not come, and if it did come, the nightmares took over. ("Romy Crismo: A Young Man in a Hurry" in Chronicles, 66)

These memories become countermemories in the context of oppositional politics in which the narratives insinuate themselves. They illustrate an epistemic battle: between the master claims of democracy/democratization as promoted through prevailing social formations and practices on the one hand, and subjugated knowledge and memories on the other. Bodies may be "vaporized" or eliminated, but memory persists, insists even when pushed to the margins, for which reason it can be fashioned into a critical or pedagogical tool against hegemony. It is these memories lodged in "interstitial zones" (to borrow from Bhabha) that have the potential to undermine regimes and discourses of truth, illustrating the inherent contradictions throughout discourse, on the basis of which we can fashion the tools to destabilize the "modes of truth production" (Brown 2000, 47).

Sacrifice, Sufferance, and Call to Conscience

Some of the narratives revolve around the themes of sufferance and sacrifices, foregrounding the idea that the risk of abduction, persecution, or even death has always been present. But the technologies of governmentality (to borrow from Foucault) are not enough to faze those who had committed themselves to the struggle, and the desaparecido suddenly becomes larger than life and put on a different plane as it were, as if seemingly invulnerable and worthy of emulation:

> When you opted to live a life with the oppressed just like Luisa, you knew the consequence of being tagged as a communist, terrorist, a destabilizer, and a threat to society. This is a truly noble endeavor. And I have never regretted that we are together in this cause. ("Wedding Anniversay" in Pagtatagpo, 49)

> Gusto kong sabihin sa iyo na tibayan mo ang loob mo. Tandaan mo na ang iyong paniniwala at paninindigan ay para sa nakararami. Mas mahusay at matapang ka sa mga may-hawak sa iyo. [I want to tell you to remain firm. Remember that your faith and conviction was for the majority. You're better and braver than those who are keeping you.] ("Isang Sulat para kay Kuya Jay" in Pagtatagpo, 132; translation mine)

These passages do not remain piteous cries in the wilderness, nonetheless, because the depression and pain are reconfigured into a desire to live until, hopefully, the spouse, parent, or sibling returns. Contrary to expectation, the loss of a loved one is not enough to break the spirit of a family:

> I will just keep the flame of courage burning in my heart to give me strength each day as I wait eagerly for your return. ("Wedding Anniversary" in Pagtatagpo, 48)

> The climate of impunity will not stop us from seeking justice. ("Letter to the Editor" in Pagtatagpo, 107)

Despite the odds, hope remains:

> Ang hirap isipin, ang hirap magtanong kung kailan ulit tayo magkikita, pero alam ko malapit na. Hindi ako nawawalan ng pag-asa. [It's hard to think, it's hard to ask when we'll meet again, but I know it will be soon. I'm not losing hope.] ("Mother's Day" in Pagtatagpo, 188; translation mine)

> Nauunawaan kong lahat ng pinagdaanan natin, naniniwala ako na hindi ka nagkamali sa pinili mong landas....Huwag mong kalimutang lagi kitang iniisip at masidhi ang aking pananabik na makikita kang muli. [I understand everything that we have gone through, I believe that we didn't make a mistake in choosing that path....Don't forget that I always think of you and I eagerly await our meeting.] ("Mother's Day" in Pagtatagpo, 188; translation mine)

Pride in most cases takes the place of despondency, and suffering becomes redemptive and liberative. Here, mothers bravely accept their sons' parallel fate, knowing that it was for some noble end—a theme that recalls the Christian motif of passion:

> Hindi ako nanghihinayang sa buhay ni Tata. Ang pinakamasakit nga lang ay kahit bangkay niya'y di namin nakita. Pero ikinararangal kong mayroon akong anak na namatay sa pakikibaka. [There's nothing to be sorry for with Tata. What really hurts is that we can't even locate his body. But I feel proud that I had a son who died in the struggle.] ("Tata" in Pagtatagpo, 290; translation mine)

> Mama would repeatedly think aloud, "Perhaps he is hungry and thirsty...his clothes...and underwear must be very dirty....He (the missing son) must be thinking that I am worried." Then she would sleep. ("Hector C. Lagman: A Paean to Labor" in Chronicles, 29)

Capitulation is far from being an option, as death is circumvented and becomes a cathartic tool. That divide between death and life is seemingly transcended, and the living and the dead infuse each other with strength of character:

> At mas lalong walang dahilan ngayon para sumuko. Lahat naman tayo mamamatay; ang mahalaga ay para kanino mo ginugol ang buhay mo....Hindi siya susuko. Hindi kami susuko. [And there's really no reason to surrender. All of us will die anyway. What's important is who you're losing your life for....He won't surrender. We will not surrender.] ("Ang Napakahabang Gabi" in Pagtatagpo, 93; translation mine)

And the tone could be menacing; in some of the narratives are undisguised calls to arms, the tell-tale signs of aggression:

> Hindi doon matatapos ang pakikibaka, dadalhin naming ang laban sa lansangan man o kabundukan. [The struggle doesn't end there, we will take the fight to the streets or to the hills even.] ("Cesar" in Pagtatagpo, 127; translation mine)

> Ayaw na naming madagdagan pa ang mga picture na ini-exhibit naming…Ayaw na naming um-attend ng ibang hearing na sa bandang huli ay madi-dismiss din naman. [We don't want to add more pictures to the exhibit….We don't want to attend any hearings because the case will be dismissed anyway.] ("Laban! Anak ng Desparecidos!" in Pagtatagpo, 191; translation mine)

A sense of urgency is likewise reflected in the pleadings of families and friends for the release of the desaparecidos, whether dead or alive. In some instances, the grievances are addressed to the very organizations or individuals they suspect of being responsible for the disappearances. Collectively, they are a gripping call to conscience, reflecting hope that those concerned would have scruples about detaining the victims further:

> To the rest of the military who still believe that they should protect the rights of the people, may you can help us find them. ("Letter to the Editor" in Pagtatagpo, 106)

> GMA said that there would be a stop to enforced disappearances. She lied….Can she sleep at night? Does she even have a feeling, compassion? Does she have virtues or honor? She vowed to protect the rights of all citizens. How can she do this to us? ("Letter to the Editor" in Pagtatagpo, 106)

> Kami ay nananawagan, kasama ang iba pang mga kaanak ng mga biktima, na itigil na ang karahasang ito…. (K)ulang na kulang pa din ang suporta mula sa gobyerno…. (Patuloy) pa din ang pagkikibit-balikat ng pamahalaan. [We're earnestly asking, together with the relatives of the other victims, for a stop to the violence…. Help from the government is not enough…. The government remains apathetic.] ("Laban! Anak ng Desaparecido" in Pagtatagpo, 191; translation mine)

The families do not mince their words, and in certain instances, they boldly declare the culpability of the military and their commander-in-chief for the disappearances. It was a political connection forged in January 2001 when then

Vice-President Gloria Arroyo was catapulted to the presidency through a military coup (via an "uprising" spearheaded by the upper and middle classes) that toppled the duly constituted authority. But why the need to eliminate people? Why carry out the dastardly act of "disappearing" persons? Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman argues that elimination is an option for regimes to establish and maintain order, an "anthropoemic" strategy which involves:

> vomiting the strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world and barring them from all communication and those inside. This was the strategy of exclusion—confining the strangers within the visible walls of the ghettos or behind the invisible, not yet less tangible, prohibition of commensality, connubium, and commercium—cleansing—expelling the strangers beyond the frontiers of the managed and manageable territory; or...destroying them physically. (in Beilharz 2007, 20).

One may also argue that the coercion, harassment, and disappearance of "strangers" (to use Bauman's term) may also be attributable to what Foucault calls "reason of state" that according to Foucault calls into question "a Christian literature on prudence and wise government" (in Dean 1999, 85). One of its features is the aim "to reinforce the state itself, its own strength, greatness and wellbeing, by protecting itself from the competition of other states and its own internal weakness" (ibid., 86). It is this reason that also has promoted biopolitics, that is, the politics that has concerned itself with "the administration of life" (Dean 1999, 99), not to mention the exclusion (often drastic) of undesirables and internal enemies through disciplinary and punitive measures. The same problematic concepts of strength and stability have been invoked time and again by regimes bent on eliminating those who dare question their mechanisms of power.

Discourse of solidarity

A discourse of solidarity runs through almost all of the narratives: grief and loss becoming transformed into something that binds the families together—a sort of collective praxis to expose and interrogate the dispositifs of terror, repression, and destruction. The sense of belonging generates strength and collectivity becomes a strategy of intensified dissidence. As pointed out earlier, the discourse of the marginalized always carries with it a "community usage" (Rosaldo 1990, 124). Always, such discourse has a communal character and bears the imprint of social or collective memories as can be read in the following passages:

> Who'll be next in our ranks....To whom will I turn to? I hope I can still lean on this government and seek justice for those victims of political repression. ("Wedding Anniversary" in Pagtatagpo, 49)

> James is among hundreds who disappeared since GMA held power. Imagine how many families, not only mine, are suffering. ("Letter to the Editor" in Pagtatagpo, 106)

> As we continue to draw strength from each other, we will relentlessly continue to search for our loved ones and (for) justice. ("Letter to the Editor" in Pagtatagpo, 107)

The family is sublated into the struggle, becoming enmeshed in a wider discourse that engulfs other families in order to nurse similar emotional wounds and engage in critical dialogues about shared experiences of loss, persecution, and harassment. Orphans find themselves in the company of other sons and daughters looking for their parents, as in the following passages:

> (Being) a son of desaparecidos, I became a son to a mother who cries for her desaparecido son. I became a friend to a daughter who is searching for her father for almost 20 years. I became a colleague to the relatives of desaparecidos and others.... I have felt the pain as they have felt.... I have felt that I am not the only person experiencing this. There are a lot of us...seeking justice.... I'm glad that I have these friends and colleagues to support us. ("I saw a lot being a son of desaparecidos" in Pagtatagpo, 182)

> Nang maging isa na kami at makilala ang iba pang kaanak ng Desaparecidos, lubos kong naunawaan kung gaano ang hirap na dinaranas ng isang nawalan. [When we became members of Desaparecidos, we recognized fully how difficult it is to lose a loved one.] ("Laban! Anak ng Desaparecido" in Pagtatagpo, 190; translation mine).

> Marami na akong nakilalang anak, asawa at kapatid ng mga desaparecidos. Nakahugot ako ng lakas sa aming karanasan at sa mga organisasyong kinilusan at pinaunlad ng mga mahal namin sa buhay na dinanas ng estado. [I have gotten to know the children, spouses, and siblings of the desaparecidos. I have drawn my strength from our experiences, and from the organizations joined by our loved ones, who were persecuted by the state.] ("Obet" in Pagtatagpo, 249; translation mine)

Through a sort of conscientization, hitherto apolitical families become willing to take up the cudgels for the disappeared, committing themselves not only to searching for their loved ones but also to the continuation of the struggle:

> My love, to this day, I will make a vow to myself. You may be physically absent, but I promise a more fervent commitment to continue what you have been doing. Yes, I am hurt and in pain, but these aren't enough for me to take a few steps backward. ("Wedding Anniversary" in Pagtatagpo, 49).

The passages show how passions and energies, when collectivized, become sources of empowerment to resist the terror techniques of the state and to overwhelm their own fears and apprehensions. Solidarity conflates the personal and political spheres, and collective strategies of resistance become the order of the day.

> We understand each other's feelings; we know how painful it is for missing parents to share the same rage against your abductors and their bosses and this.... I know we are all connected because of this tragedy of enforced disappearance, a state practice that should be stopped and never repeated. ("A Daughter's Wish for Her Missing Father on Father's Day" in Pagtatagpo, 281)

Conclusion

What I have presented is an analysis of the testimonial narratives of the families and friends of the disappeared. In particular, my reading was predicated on the twin notions of countermemory and counternarrative. As narratives that report the loss of a loved one, coupled with reflections on grief and bereavement and with calls to concrete political action, testimonios implicate the dialectic inseparability of the private and public spheres, the personal and the political. The discussion shows how testimonial literature can indeed be used as a pedagogical tool of resistance against the state and its apparatuses that are bent on imposing common sets of ideals while peripheralizing dissenting views and opinions. These narratives reaffirm the need to decode, if not subvert, history as we know it by looking at this common mode of entextualizing the past with a postpositivist, praxis-oriented, and oppositional tactic that reconfigures history into a mosaic of lived experiences and competing narratives.

In this regard, what also deserves to be challenged is the very notion of impartiality which remains characteristic of mainstream academic knowledge and public "facts" that constitute hegemonic culture. It bears an affinity to the liberal humanist discourse promoting the concept of "man" as the source of knowledge and also to the modernist infatuation with rationality. Impartiality, according to Nathalia Jaramillo (2010, 85), "often disguises a tacit support for hegemonic relations...and

legitimates bureaucratic authority." It is imperative, I submit, that one take on critical, if not avowedly partisan, politics in order to articulate spaces for dialogic praxis while remaining open to the diversity of the subject positionalities of their very interlocutors. Testimonial literature, given its politics-laden and counter-hegemonic character, fits this sort of project. Likewise testimonios, being protean and demotic, as Hutchinson would describe them, transgress the established discourse of modernist literary aesthetics.

Testimonial writings constitute a response to the postmodern call for broadening the range of texts that constitutes the politics of representation. Given that the testimonial writings used in this paper are from the prisms of groups within the organized left, future projects may include other voices. That is, voices operating within other programmatic, if utopian, discourses reflecting different positionalities and varied critical perspectives other than those associated with the largely doctrinal praxiology of the organized left.

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