



THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SUPER TYPHOON YOLANDA MEMORIALS IN TACLOBAN CITY

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Abstract

This study explores the historical and cultural significance of Yolanda memorials dedicated to the victims of Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in Tacloban City. The study employs a qualitative design, it captures survivor narratives to understand how memorials serve as spaces for collective mourning, resilience, and remembrance. Results of the study highlight memorials like the Yolanda Mass Grave and the Yolanda Shipwreck, Yolanda Monuments are more than commemorative sites; they provide healing spaces for survivors, foster community solidarity, and promote awareness of disaster preparedness and climate change impacts. These memorials embody the strength and resilience of the Taclobanon community, preserving the memory of loss and survival for future generations. This research underscores the value of memorials in educating about disaster preparedness and climate change, recommending that future studies further examine memorials' roles in fostering climate awareness and community resilience.

.Keywords: Super Typhoon Yolanda, memorials, cultural significance, healing spaces

Introduction:

Memorial complexes are communal space for collective mourning and reflection. It has a special general cultural significance that provides a connection with the past of the state, events and the people. (Oleksiiuchenko et al., 2018). It is not just a site for mourning but a beacon of resilience and gratitude for the legacy of those who are laid.

On 8th of November 2013 a category 5 storm called Super typhoon Yolanda (internationally referred as Haiyan) struck the Philippines particularly the Eastern Visayas Region with sustained winds surpassing 150 mph with a 6-meter-high storm surge. The worst affected areas were the islands of Leyte and Samar leaving a great casualty especially the Tacloban-Palo district. The super typhoon made its landfall affecting 14 million people reaching a record 6,300 death toll and 1,063 missing as for the record (NDRRMC). According to Vrtikapa (2022) Typhoon Haiyan's destructive power destroyed and washed-out homes, knocked out power supply, severely damaged infrastructure and caused agricultural losses in many of the towns. Challenges remained, such as flooded evacuation centers and difficulties in getting necessary supplies and medical help to vulnerable areas. Despite the City government's efforts of imposing protocols and warning, people living in the low-lying areas failed to prepare for the tidal wave surge that engulfed thousands of lives and homes (Siguan, 2022). Super typhoon Haiyan is not just about a story of losing but of surviving. One of the fiercest and formidable super typhoons in the history ever recorded, it caused extensive damage and left a scar on the lives of the people and ruins of hopelessness and dreams. A tragic historical event and never-ending battle of trauma for the Yolanda survivor.



Memorials have a significant role in remembering the lives of the victims, it is primarily built to emphasize its commemorative function of person or an event – a place where life and death is respectfully celebrated. In the aftermath of the Super Typhoon, the 6,300 who lost their lives on the onslaught and the 1,063 unretrieved and missing victims who perished were laid in a different memorial park to honor their lives. The Yolanda Mass grave in Holy Cross Memorial situated in Brgy, Basper Tacloban City was the final resting place of the 2,273 unnamed victims. The 3,000 white crosses were put on top of the mass grave as markers where families, relatives and friends could put a flower, light a candle and offer a prayer to the victims who lost their lives during the storm (Sabornido, 2015). Another site to pay tribute to the souls of the victims is the Yolanda Memorial Monument located beside the Tacloban Convention Center in Sagkahan. Names of victims are engraved through an epitaph surrounding the memorial. Eleven years later, this location has been ingrained in the culture of the survivors, serving as a center for healing and a yearly reminder of the victims' courage.

In this paper, the researcher aims to understand not only the collective memory but the historical significance of Yolanda Memorial and its importance to the Yolanda Survivor eleven years after the strike of Super typhoon. This paper also explores the preservation of historical memories of the Super typhoon Yolanda victims as the victims commemorate the yearly battle of agony. This study ensures the following are addressed; (a) What ways do the memorials honor and represent the victims of Typhoon Yolanda?) (b.) What is the cultural significance of the memorials held for the survivors and for the community? (c) What is the contribution of the Yolanda memorial in preservation of historical stories about the disaster and the events that followed?

Methods & Materials:

This study employs qualitative research design to capture the depth and richness of experiences through narrative inquiry in understanding the historical significance of Super Typhoon Yolanda Memorials to the victims of typhoon eleven years later. Qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior (Tenny et al., 2022). It highlights one-on-one in-depth interviews, and respondent's storytelling as a means to gain understanding and insights in their collective accounts. The narratives of the respondents will uncover underlying themes and patterns. The responses of the respondents from the interviews will be compared and consolidated until a complete analysis is formed with regards to the historical significance of the super typhoon memorial to the victims. The experiences of the respondents and the answers from the researchers' interviews will serve to reinforce the results of this study.

Research Locale

The researcher conducted this study in Tacloban City, Leyte. One of the places that severely experienced the full force and the center of the northern eyewall of the super typhoon. In connection with this, there were memorials and monuments built in the city in honor for the lives and resilience of the victims and for the community to commemorate.

Participants

Purposive and Snowball sampling is used to gather and identify the respondents of the study. Participants were chosen based on the established selection criteria from Pardillo (2024). Criteria are then adjusted to fit the qualified research respondent where; (a) respondent must be of legal age and residing in Tacloban during the super typhoon onslaught, (b) respondent must have firsthand experience of the Typhoon Yolanda, (c) respondents must sustained injuries or had a family relative injured/ deceased on the event (d) must have knowledge and express willingness to share information/experiences through one-on-one interview.



Research Instruments

A semi-structured interview is used to the respondents who qualified on the selection criteria. In order to gather in-depth experiences and personal narratives of the survivors, family members of victims who have direct connection to the memorial. The guiding questions will align with the research objectives, focusing on contexts in understanding the historical significance of super typhoon Yolanda memorial. Respondents are encouraged to freely share their experiences and personal narratives. The researchers will also utilize tools like audio recorders which will be transcribed into written documents for further analysis in gathering accurate and reliable information.

Ethical Consideration

This research provides ethical considerations for the participants, first, identities of the respondents will be kept private through the use of pseudonyms or altered names. They are given the freedom and right to withdraw at any time without needing to provide any reason. Second, the data, statements obtained from interviews, and the use of audio recordings will have the participants' consent. The collected information will be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes. Third, as a sign of respect for the participants, the information obtained will be properly credited. Fourth, the researchers will treat the acquired information without bias and will undergo thorough analysis to ensure accurate and appropriate results.

Data Analysis

The researcher employed thematic analysis to understand the key themes that exist and to examine patterns from the collected information. Data was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with survivors who met the criteria. The transcripts from the interview audio recordings followed a coding process, where the researchers repeatedly read the respondents' answers from the generated transcripts to identify potential emerging themes or patterns. Similar codes were grouped into overarching themes. The researcher analyzed and categorized similar themes to develop the overall elements of the data. Additionally, the researchers used tables to present and display the overall results effectively

Results and Discussion:

There were six qualified respondents who expressed willingness to be interviewed and share their personal narrative and experiences of Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan). Researchers then asked the respondents consents to use audio-recorder for further analysis. For confidentiality purposes, the researcher used pseudonyms to keep the respondent's identity private.



Table 1 Respondents Profile

Name	Age	Status after Typhoon
Anton	56	Loss his wife and 3 children
Jed	32	Severely injured/swam across debris due to storm surge
Ester	47	Severely injured
Maria	43	Sustained injuries
Boyet	52	Loss his youngest son swam across debris due to storm surge
Ruby	62	Lost her husband, house was totally washed out

Eleven years later, survivors at count are still haunted by the past and the memories it brings as Super Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) brought great casualty and devastation in the lives of the survivors. Respondents shared their insight how Yolanda memorials such as Yolanda mass graves serve various functions in honoring and representing their family members and other victims in a meaningful way.

Table 2: Ways how memorials honor and represent the victims of Typhoon Yolanda

Representation of Memorial	Description
Commemoration	Respondents perceive memorials as a way to commemorate ensuring that the memories of the victims are not put behind. A way for the city to acknowledge and process grief in celebrating every anniversary.
Healing Space	Become a place for mourning, allowing survivors and families to come together in remembrance.
Awareness	Raise awareness about the impacts of climate change and the importance of disaster preparedness, ensuring that the memory of the victims contributes to future prevention efforts.

Commemoration based on the table above respondents who sustained severe injuries during the onslaught of Super typhoon Yolanda shared sentiments how these memorials signify strength to the bravery of those who were laid, bravery for the family to continue without having a chance to embrace their loved ones and it also signify a memory of the past. And respondents who lost a member of their



family expressed different degrees of pain because of grief and trauma. Respondents positively see these memorials as a means of keeping their loved ones and other victims alive in their mind. A commemorative function to honor the people whose lives were cut short and how much the city was changed forever. According to one of the respondents;

“Ine nga mass grave dako gud an bulig sugad ha akon nga nawad’an hin asawa ngan tulo nga anak dida han bagyo kay grabe an akon gin-agi, masulub-on ako ha maiha nga panahon. Ngan ha mga adlaw nga ginmimingaw ako ginhihinumdom ko la hira, an akon Asawa, an akon mga anak. Baga... ada la gihap an kasakit asya usahay nagtatangis gud ako.”

(“This mass grave offers a great help for me, as someone who lost a wife and 3 children during the Typhoon, because I went through so much; I was sad for a long time. There are days that I feel alone and I just remember them. It feels like...the pains is still there and I find myself crying”)

Healing Space memorials are built for different functions. As for the respondents, these memorial sites serve as a healing space – a coping mechanism that elicits emotional reactions, especially since respondents and other survivors are emotionally connected in these sites. By visiting the place whenever they miss their loved ones, they process grief and find solace through paying tribute and offering food and prayer. As one of the respondents shared:

“Usa ini nga lugar hin pag-ayo kay bisan pira la nga minuto an amon gingagahin pagbisita, pagdagkot la hin kandila, mayda la ako naabat nga iba. May mga panahon nga kon na-iinop ko an akon bana, ngan napakadto ako ha Basper kun diin hiya iginlubong. Para ha akon, baga hin karuyag niya nga bumisita ako ha iya, ngan ini gihapon an panahon nga kun nahihidlaw ako ha iya, kaupod namon an akon anak ngan napakadto kami ha memoryal bisitahon hiya.”

(“It is a place of healing because even if our visits are brief, just lighting a candle, I feel something different. There are times when I dream of my husband, and I would go and visit the memorial where he was buried. For me, it feels like my husband wants me to visit him, and that is also the time when, if I’m longing for him, my child and I go there to visit.”)

Raising awareness of the aftermath of Yolanda teaches everyone to be vigilant, take action in times of disaster. How important it is to follow the government mandate and warning. It also raises awareness about climate change and how our environment can destroy us. As the respondents shared:

“Antes pa han bagyo, mayda na adto nagpapatrolya nga tanod sakay han ira barangay mobile kon diin ba dapat mag-ebakweyt an mga residente asay pa nga ligid la kami han dagat. Waray man liwat kasi kami tumuod pag-ebakweyt kay damo an amon gamit ha tindahan. Salit han lumasurbo an bagyo tigda nagdako an tubig ngan naglinangoy kami upod han damo nga mga sim, ngan damo la. Bisan kon waray man may nawara ha akon pamilya nakikita ko kon gaano ka importante ine nga Yolanda Memorial kay naghahatag hiya hin leksyon ha akon ngan sigurado ako ha iba liwa nga waray tumuod han una nga deri unahon an mga material na gamit. Durot na gihap ito han mapaspas nga pagbag-o han panahon yana.”

(“Before the typhoon, there were community watchmen patrolling in their barangay mobile, advising where residents should evacuate, especially when we were close to the sea. We didn't believe we needed to evacuate because we had a lot of things in our store (public market) and the weather seemed fine earlier. So, when the typhoon hit, the water suddenly rose, and we had to swim



along with a lot of debris. Even though I didn't lose anyone in my family, I see how important the Yolanda Memorial is because it teaches me that material things are insignificant. This is clear in the face of rapid climate change.")

Table 3: Cultural significance of the memorials

Cultural Significance of Yolanda Memorial	Explanation
Cultural Identity	Memorials incorporate cultural symbols as identity that reflects the unique heritage of the community. Survivors are identified as resilient, hopeful and exhibit solidarity
Symbol of Strength	Memorials and monuments represent the community's ability to come together in the face of adversity, symbolizing hope, resilience, and the determination to rebuild and move forward.
Historical Preservation	Memorial serve as important historical markers, preserving the memory of the disaster and the local narrative of the survivor and its impact on the community for future generations.

The result of the study shows that the Yolanda memorial holds cultural significance to the lives of the super typhoon Yolanda victims.

Cultural Identity These memorials are sites where a community can share their history and the memory it brings. The structures of memorials often bring honor to significant events and individuals that are worth remembering. As the tagged line goes “Deri la Bangon kundi Better, Better Bangon”. According to the narrative shared by one of the respondents:

“Para ha akon, ine nga memoryal kay nagsisimbolo ngan nagpapakilala kon paonan-o kadig-on ngan kamabuliganon han mga waray-waray. Importante ine nga memoryal kay usa ine hiya han aton pangirilal-an kay nagtatagana ine hin sagrado nga lugar para ha mga pamilya nga makig-usa ha espirituhanon nga paagi, ngan hinumduman an mga kinabuhi han mga nawara ha usa nga paagi nga mayda pagtahod ha kultura ngan pag-ayo. An mga komunidad nag-uusa ha mga panahon han kawaray. An mga memoryal kadalasan nagiging mga lugar hin pag-ampo, paghinumdom, ngan mga seremonya han pagdagkot hin kandila ngan nananbo ine kada-anibersaryo. Yana nga tuig asya an ika-onse. Magdadagkot lak gawas amon balay”

("For me, this memorial symbolizes and demonstrates the strength and compassion of the Waray-Waray people. This memorial is important because it is part of our identity, as it provides a sacred space for families to connect spiritually and remember the lives of those lost in a way that respects culture and healing. Communities come together in times of loss. Memorials often become places for prayer, remembrance, and candle-lighting ceremonies, and they are lit every anniversary. This year is the eleventh. We will light candles outside our house.")



Symbol of Strength memorials capture the sorrow and the tragedy in the aftermath of the Typhoon. It reminds the survivor of the strength found as a community. Emotionally, they are places where people remember not only what they've lost but also how survivors managed to keep going. Culturally, memorials represent the toughness of Taclobanon. Even after the devastation, people gave attention in rebuilding their lives, their surroundings, held onto their faith, and found ways to support each other. These memorials aren't just markers of what happened as they are reminders of how Taclobanon came together and stayed strong.

“Aw, an mga Taga-Tacloban ginkilala sugad nga mag-isog ngan siguro asya ito an ginsisimbolo han memoryal. para hadton mga biktima nga napuypuy han bagyo, ngan syempre hadton mga taclobanon nga maisog nga gin-atubang an damo nga problema. Siring pa nira, mag-isog kuno kita. Salit pangiriral-an ine nga mga memoryal han aton mga kamag-isog.”

("This memorial symbolizes the courage of the people of Tacloban, especially for the victims who were perished by the typhoon, and of course for the Taclobanon who bravely faced many challenges. As they say, we are strong. So, because of this memorial this became our identity as someone who is strong")

Historical Preservation involves documenting, commemorating, and safeguarding the memories and impacts of the disaster that struck the Philippines in November 2013. The whole world was shaken by the news when it lands in one of the provinces in the Philippines. Oral histories, written accounts, and visual media have been collected to capture the personal experiences of survivors. This includes stories of loss, survival, and community resilience, contributing to a broader understanding of the typhoon's impact. The narrative of one of the respondents shared:

“Tungod han kakusgon han bagyo, antes pa man han Nov. 8 damo na an akon nakita nga mga reporters didi ha Tacloban, mayda pa ngani mga amerikano nga nagpasingadi ha aton lugar para igbalita an kakusog han bagyo. Ngan tinuod gud man kay tungod hine nga mga tawo damo an bulig nga umabot para ha aton. Damo an naghimo hin mga salida (documentary), mayda naman iba nga namagsurat hin mga libro, ngan naghimo hin kanta. Ano an importansya han memoryal? Nahimo hine nga maipabilin o mapreserba nga padayon nga magin buhi an mga personal na kaagi han mga biktima bisan pa man pira na katuig an naglabay”

("Because of the strength of the typhoon, even before November 8, I already saw many reporters here in Tacloban, and there were even some Americans who came to our area to report on the strength of the typhoon. And it was really true, because of these people, a lot of help arrived for us. Many made films (documentaries), some wrote books, and others composed songs. What is the importance of the memorial? It has made it possible to preserve and keep alive the personal experiences of the victims, even after many years have passed.")



Table 4: Contribution of the Yolanda Memorial in Preservation of Historical Stories

Contribution of Yolanda memorial in preservation historical stories	Explanation
Educating Future Generations	Memorial teaches communities and students by ensuring that people understand the importance of disaster preparedness
Documenting Personal Experiences	Serve as repositories for the personal stories of survivors, written accounts, and multimedia documentation are preserved and passed down to future generations, ensuring that the history of the disaster remains alive and accessible.
Promoting Climate Change	memorials also serve as symbols of the urgency of addressing climate change

Educating Future Generations As survivors shared their oral narratives, survivors vividly remember how they failed to prepare before the typhoon. It was hard for them to believe the news prior to the day of the disaster as the weather seemed calm and fine. As shared by one of the respondents:

“Malipong man adto nga panahon kay mapipingi-itan an sirak pero nakakabati na ako hadto han mga tawo didi ha amon barangay nga signal number 3 na. Ano nga signal number 3 nga kasisirak man hadto han panahon? Waray ako mangandam, an amon balay ada la ha seawall, waray pa daw ako makapalit hadto hin pagkaon o bis naman la ano kay di man adto nag-iinuran asya an akon paghuna nga dire hiya kurulbaan nga bagyo. Sugad nga amay, waray pa daw ak gihap hadto plano nga magbakweyt, dire gihap ak hiton *nasabot nga storm surge. Leksyon gud ha akon adto an Yolanda nga kinahanglan makusog o madire an bagyo importante ngayan an pangandam. Kay iton nga mass grave usa la nga pamatuod nga kaya makaawat hin kinabuhi it bagyo kon an mga tawo dire mangandam.*”

("It felt like just another time because the sun was still shining, but I could already hear people in our Barangay saying that it was already Signal No. 3. What kind of Signal No. 3 was it, when the weather was still fine at that time? I wasn't prepared; our house was right by the seawall, and I hadn't even bought food or anything because it wasn't raining yet. That's why I thought it wasn't a big deal, that the typhoon wouldn't be severe. As a father, I still hadn't thought about evacuating, and I still didn't understand what a storm surge was. The lesson I learned from Yolanda is that whether the typhoon is strong or weak, preparation is really important. Because that mass grave is just one proof that a typhoon can take lives if people don't prepare.")

The impact of the Super Typhoon was so severe that the preparations were still insufficient for many affected communities during that time. the importance of disaster preparedness for Typhoon Yolanda lies in the lessons learned from the magnitude of the destruction and the resilience displayed by communities in its aftermath. Preparedness saves lives, reduces damage, and speeds up recovery. It



is not only about physical infrastructure or having an emergency kit but about building a culture of readiness, resilience to take action during and after disaster. What happened during Typhoon Yolanda is an eye opener to all that the impact can cause long-term.

Documenting Personal Experiences capturing individual stories of survivors, witnesses, and victims of the super typhoon. The personal accounts are the firsthand experiences of the victim, the emotional and physical struggles of the survivors during the onslaught, and the process of recovery in the aftermath contributes in preserving the memory making it a living part of history that honors the lives affected. It also gives emphasis on being vigilant to early warning and weather forecasts.

Promoting Climate Change Yolanda Memorials contributes in communicating the urgent need for action against climate change and the increasing severity of natural disasters. This memorial holds not just memories but a story of hope and resilience, testimonies from survivors and victims, reminding visitors of the typhoon's unprecedented strength and widespread destruction. The Yolanda memorials show how intense weather events are becoming more frequent and unpredictable, underscoring the need for urgent action on climate change. From a calm and sunny day turns into unimaginative destruction. A legacy of climate change.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the study, the Yolanda memorials in Tacloban hold deep cultural and emotional significance for survivors of Super Typhoon Yolanda (internationally referred to as Haiyan). These memorials such as the Mass grave in Basper, Yolanda Shipwreck, Yolanda monument, and other various memorial serve as sacred spaces where the community can collectively mourn, honor the memories of lost loved ones, and find healing. A place where death, life and memory are honored and celebrated. These memorials are more than physical structures; It represents resilience, remembrance, and the enduring strength of the Taclobanon spirit. Through the memorials, survivors and future generations are reminded of the lessons in disaster preparedness, the impacts of climate change, and the importance of community solidarity, an event that will be engraved in history.

The study underscores the memorials' role in preserving historical narratives and educating the public about the devastation and recovery journey. By capturing personal stories and community responses, the Yolanda memorials become symbols of the shared experience of loss and survival, fostering resilience and unity in the face of adversity.

The study recommends that future researchers may further examine memorials' roles in fostering climate awareness and community resilience given the increasing frequency of climate-related disasters, examining how memorials influence public awareness and action toward climate change can offer valuable insights.



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