

This piece I'm reading tonight
is an excerpt from a longer piece called
Memories of Cebu: Three-Ways.

Cebu is the place where I was born and raised.
It is also one of the islands affected by Typhoon Haiyan.

I wrote this piece in October,
before the typhoon,
and it captures
my experience
of another typhoon that hit in the 1990s
when I was in high school.

It's called

Croaky Chorus

I dedicate this to my auntie Ekit and uncle Lindo
whose home was damaged by Haiyan
to my dear friend, Maebe,
whose whole village was wiped out
and to my former students and friends,
Joan, Julla, Itin, Pypai, Karen and Marivil
who mobilized their own relief efforts
so that people in remote villages
would not go hungry.
Their courage inspire me.

Pause

Croaky Chorus

The storm has passed.
But still

I couldn't sleep.

My brother and I
have long since put away
the dozens of buckets we used
to collect the rainwater
escaping from our leaky roof.

My father
has nailed back
the corrugated iron
that was ripped apart
by the angry wind.

The storm has passed.
But still
I couldn't sleep.

From where I was lying
on the sleeping mat
under the mosquito net,
I noticed
how the room
was bathed
in moonlight.

My mother
was softly snoring
beside me.

I listened
to nature's sounds outside,
dominated by the chorus
of frogs.

They lived
amongst the water spinach
in the swamp
in front of our house.

A handful of the croaky critters led the melody.

The tenors and bass
joined in,
harmonizing throatily.

The amorous baritones
completed
the chorus.

Hundreds of frogs
in vocal union,
sounding
like an amphibian version
of Beethoven's
Ode to Joy.

After the ecstatic crescendo,
only a couple of frogs called out
to each other
and then –

SILENCE.

I snuggled
close to my mother.

I put my thin, small arm
around her
and felt it rising
and falling
with her breathing.

Her soft snoring
finally
lulled me to sleep.