The Wave, the Wound and the Witness: Climate Trauma, Ethics and Listening in *Les Mains L*âch*é*es

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Abstract On 8 November 2013, super typhoon Haiyan wreaked havoc in the Philippines, killing over 6,000 people thus making it one of the most powerful typhoons in recorded history. One of the literary works that have since tried to make sense of this climate trauma is the well-acclaimed novel *Les mains lâchées* by Anaïs Llobet published by Editions Plon, Paris, 2016. *Les mains lâchées* recounts the story of Madel, a reporter who realises she just survived a "triple tsunami." She is plagued by survivor's guilt, having let go of the hand of a child she was entrusted with and leaving the body of her lover, Jan. Forced by her editor to cover the catastrophe for the TV news, the persona finds herself listening to survivors, while dealing with issues on voyeurism, witnessing and ethics. I am interested in exploring the ethics of witnessing in *Les mains lâchées*. Thus, in this essay, I propose to first define trauma and witnessing, then theorise ethical listening and clarify why survivors resort to writing. After close-reading, I examine why the novel can be an appropriate medium in order to do justice to witnessing. Lastly, I explore translation as a form of "listening again" and interrogate the role of the reader, especially as receiver of trauma fiction. Ultimately, I argue that *Les mains lâchées*, as a literary form, allows for empathic, ethical listening, and postcolonial witnessing.

Key words Yolanda; survivor; empathy; novel; translation

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Making six landfalls in Eastern Samar on November 8, 2013, super typhoon Haiyan, locally named Yolanda, lashed the country "with wind speeds of more than 300 km/h" and storm surges — tsunami-like waves — of over four meters (Featherstone, et. al. 7). Areas up to 100 kilometers from the eye of the typhoon "suffered 80% to total destruction of public facilities, houses and commercial establishments" (European Commission 2). Damaging 1.1 million houses, and displacing four million people, Haiyan affected more than 14 million people (Featherstone, et. al. 7). Killing over 6,000 people, Yolanda is now known as "one of the most powerful typhoons ever to make landfall in recorded history" (Lagmay, et. al. 1).

Since then, several writers have resorted to poetry, fiction, plays and essays in order to either come to terms with the catastrophe and/ or to pay tribute to the ones who passed away. Perhaps the two most famous volumes that should be mentioned are *Our Memory of Water*, edited by Merlie Alunan; and *Agam*, commissioned and edited by the ICSC (Institute for Climate Change and Sustainable Cities). These edited books feature the works of Filipino poets, fictionists and essayists. The award-winning *Agam*, notably, highlights 26 photographs and the literary works of 24 Filipino writers in eight local languages. Last but not least, the Philippine Educational Theater Assocation (PETA) adapted Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in bilingual Tagalog and English. However, instead of focusing on a Magician, his daughter and Caliban, the storyline underscored the effects of a terrible storm surge or tsunami threatening the lives in an island.

The Haiyan phenomena also attracted writers outside the Philippines. One such literary work is the well-acclaimed novel *Les mains lâchées*, published by Editions Plon, Paris, in 2016. *Les mains lâchées,* which literally means "released hands," or, in the context of the book, "lost grip[1]," is based on the first-hand experience of AFP French journalist Anaïs Llobet. The novel recounts the story of Madel, a reporter who realizes she just survived a "triple tsunami." She is plagued by survivor's guilt, having let go of the hand of a child she was entrusted with and leaving the body of her lover, Jan. Forced by her editor to cover the catastrophe for the TV news, the persona finds herself listening to survivors, while dealing with issues on voyeurism, witnessing and ethics.

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[1] In this essay, all translations from French to English are mine.

Consequently, I am interested in exploring the ethics of witnessing in *Les mains lâchées*. Rich in questions related to ethics of representation, the novel leads me to ask the following questions: when does media coverage start venturing to "climate disaster porn? How does Madel negotiate her position as a Western journalist-turned trauma survivor?

Not only is the plot worth discussing from an ethical point of view, equally interesting to examine is its form. In an interview[1], Llobet revealed how she needed to write a novel, instead of just a news piece, in order to do justice to witnessing. In this sentence alone, three ideas are already implied which need further analysis: the impetus to witness after trauma; witnessing through writing, and the choice of the novel as the more appropriate medium.

Thus, in this essay, I propose to first define trauma and witnessing. Corollary to the description of witnessing, it is necessary to theorise ethical listening and to clarify why survivors resort to writing. After close-reading the novel, I will examine why the novel can be an appropriate medium in order to do justice to witnessing. Lastly, I will also explore translation as a form of "listening again" and interrogate the role of the reader, especially as receiver of trauma fiction. Ultimately, I argue that *Les mains lâchées*, as a literary form, allows for empathic, ethical listening, and postcolonial witnessing.

Trauma, Witnessing, Listening, Writing

Originally from Greek, the word *trauma* refers to a "wound of the mind" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 4). According to Sigmund Freud's 1914 essay "Remembering, Repeating, Working-through," one key characteristic of trauma is what is called *Nachträglichkeit*, which some translate as "afterwardness" or "belatedness." Belatedness is a situation in which the effects of trauma still come years after the traumatic event, thereby impeding the linearity of one's life, interrupting the subjective fluidity of one's chronological sense of time.

In the 1980s, the American Psychiatric Association gave trauma a canonical psychiatric classification in the form of PTSD or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. By including PTSD in its diagnostic manual edition, the APA acknowledges a "new illness" from people who usually have escaped death, serious injuries, wars, disasters, accidents, or other extreme stressor events" (Luckhurst 1). Symptoms include depression, cynicism, and total absence of recall (Visser 270); but also "intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams … emotional numbing ... loss of temper control, hyper-vigilance or exaggerated startle response (Luckhurst 1).

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[1] With Joris Zylberman in *Asialyst*. See as well her interview in TV5 Monde.

PTSD has since undergone a lot of revisions in order to be inclusive of newly explored cases[1]. At any rate, for our present concerns, suffice to retain that individuals suffering from trauma can be described as caught in an oscillation between "a crisis of death and a crisis of life" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 7). Thus, those who live to tell trauma are usually survivor-witnesses.

A witness is frequently associated to "eyewitnesses" (Hartman 37) whose testimonies are "told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts" (Beverley 31). However, in her award-winning work on Rwandan women's writing, *From Surviving to Living*, Catherine Gilbert explains how the category of "witness" has since expanded to three categories: The first category belongs to the survivor-witness or direct witness from whom one demands his or her "presence at the event and the authenticity of testimony" (Gilbert 54; 59). According to Dawes, survivors are usually confronted with the following paradoxical dilemma: "Do I have the right to talk about this? And, do I have the right *not* to talk about this?" (24, emphasis in original)"[2].

Next, the secondary or indirect witness includes outside observers and, later, second generation survivors[3] (54; 59). LaCapra extends this category to include "interviewers, historians and commentators (such as academics), as well as viewers/ readers of testimony (98)."

Lastly, the reader-witness, as the engaged receiver of testimony, can be classified under the third category (Gilbert 54). I will talk more about the reader-witness at the end of the essay. In *Les mains lâchées*, Madel, survivor of Haiyan, clearly satisfies the criteria of the first category. However, by listening and recording the stories of other survivors, Madel will also inhabit the role of secondary witness.

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[1] In 1992 Judith Herman coined the term "complex posttraumatic stress disorder" to include prolonged and repeated trauma. Classified in this category could be "hostages, prisoners of war, concentration camp survivors, and survivors of some religious cults" (Herman 121) who have undergone a history of subjection to totalitarian control over months or years. Examples can also include "those subjected to totalitarian systems in sexual and domestic life, including survivors of domestic battering, childhood physical or sexual abuse, and organized sexual exploitation" (ibid.). According to Herman (ibid., 122), the advantage of naming this new category "represents an essential step toward granting those who have endured prolonged exploitation a measure of the recognition they deserve" (ibid). Further, in the fifth edition of its*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*(*DSM-5*) the American Psychiatric Association (APA 2013) clarifies the diagnostic criteria for PTSD. I have elaborated these developments in a recent work published in *Philippine Studies* in 2018. See Works Cited.

[2] Dawes continues: "The act of bearing witness is bounded by 'the poles of entitlement (What gives me the moral authority to tell this story? How can I prove my authenticity to my readers?) and obligation (How much of myself am I required to give to this story? What is my duty, and when am I free of it?)' (24-25)".

[3] Like children of Holocaust survivors, who, although they never experienced the Shoah first hand, their lives have been shaped by the trauma and silence of their parents. See "The Generation of Postmemory" by Marianne Hirsch and the *Holocaust Novel* by Ephraim Sicher.

As receivers of testimonies, the secondary witness-listener "plays an active role in the construction of the narrative rather than simply listening" (Gilbert 135). In point of fact, witnesses need to know that they are talking to a real person. "Bearing witness to trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener" (Laub and Allard 809) since testimonies are not supposed to be "monologues." Witnesses need to know that "they are talking to *somebody*" (Laub and Allard 809, emphasis in original). As such, listeners "make witnessing happen" (Gilbert 132). They enable testimony (Laub 58) and help restore "the survivor's sense of agency and belonging" (Gilbert 135). Listening can function as "an act of attention that registers uniqueness of the other's narrative" (Couldry 9) where telling a story can be "a form of recognition through which we recognise our stories as entangled with the stories of others" (Bassel 9). Such exchange, hopefully, creates "new, wider spaces of participation where narrative resources are redistributed" (Bassel 65).

Of course, there is always a risk for the listener to "shape or alter the witness's story according to the listener's own intentions" (Gilbert 136), thus exercising a sort of hegemonic control over the other's narrative. The challenge, in other words, can be described as "selective audibility, not being heard on one's own terms" (Bassel 34). However, for Bassel and Dobson, instead of letting such risks hamper the politics of listening, dialogue should be understood as a "structured disagreement." According to Dobson, "dialogic democracy" takes its time, "engineers silence [and] makes sure all voices have been heard — and then it listens again" (Dobson 138).

Another form of what I call "mislistening" involves diluting oneself into the uniqueness of the other's story. In his book, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick La Capra notes the difficulty that "arises when the virtual experience involved in empathy gives way to vicarious victimhood, and empathy with the victim seems to become an identity" (47). Against an empathy of fusion, he coins the concept of "empathic unsettlement" which "involves a kind of virtual experience" wherein one tries to put oneself in the position of the other "while recognizing the difference … hence not taking the other's place" (LaCapra 78). Such a stance allows empathy without claiming, what Claude Lanzmann has called the absolute "obscenity" of trying to understand[1] (Thanassekos 45).

This is why, first and foremost, listening assumes "responsiveness to difference" and “receptive generosity” (Bassel 4). Leah Bassel illustrates these points in her work, *Politics of Listening*: “The first step for me was to stop talking, to shift from speaking to listening… listen with humility rather than charging in with a pet theory and fitting complex events within it” (4). Similarly, Andrew Dobson’s “apophatic listening” (2014) involves “temporary suspension of one’s own categories, frames and expectations” with a view “to listening to what is ‘actually being said’, and to listening out for the unexpected and surprising” (Bassel 5).

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[1] «Ily a bien une obscénité absolue du projet de comprendre».

Hence, in this essay, in view of examining ethical representation and witnessing, I shall pay attention to forms of listening and empathic unsettlement in the content and form of *Les mains lâchées*. At present, however, I want to clarify the last-but-not-least itinerary in trauma and witnessing: writing, writing as “giving birth,” writing as a process of agency, writing as coming to terms with the past, writing as requiem.

Of course, “survival does not include any particular responsibility other than continuing to survive” (Frank 137). Survivors don’t necessarily have to witness nor write. For most who have been endowed with the blessing — or the burden — of a “second life,” however, the impetus to write comes from the survivor-witness’s need to make sense of the past in order to, with time, “recover” agency. According to Kali Tal, writing “serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author” (21). Again, the key element of PTSD, belatedness, interrupts the linearity of the survivor’s present life through flashback, hypervigilance and startled responses. Narrativity, therefore, helps in the process of linearity by allowing the person to establish a certain chronology and to discern past and present. Henke, for one, calls such writing “scriptotherapy” (Henke xvi). This is why LaCapra describes post-traumatic writing as “a means of bearing witness to, enacting, and, to some extent, working over and through trauma whether personally experienced, transmitted from intimates, or sensed in one’s larger social and cultural setting” (105). Hence, writing makes one open up to a larger community.

Consequently, this “act of testimony constitutes a means of honouring the memory of the victims and may also be an attempt to assuage the guilt felt by survivors” (Gilbert 69). Survivor syndrome, which is composed of “gnawing feelings of self-reproach because they survived while their loved ones did not” (Leys 44), empowers the witness with what Lifton labels as a “survivor mission” (Caruth, *Trauma* 138) or a “duty to remember”: to live to tell. Such is the situation of Madel, our protagonist in *Les mains lâchées*.

The Protagonist as Critical Survivor-Witness

The first person point of view of the novel is clearly Madel's through whose eyes and thoughts the reader follows an itinerary of trauma and empathy. Again, Madel is a first-degree trauma survivor herself. She satisfies most criteria of PTSD: intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, exaggerated startle-response, and hyper-vigilance (Luckhurst 1). Nightmares disturb her nights (Llobet 58) and, all throughout the novel, the perennial refrain of survivor's guilt haunts her. Her abandonment in searching for Jan's body and her inability in retaining Rodjun's hand evoke the title of the novel, *les mains lâchées*, the cause of trauma. Even a year after Yolanda, Madel suffers from *Nachträglichkeit* or belatedness, the distinctive characteristic of trauma, wherein the past interrupts the linearity of present life. The minute she enters her room, she remarks: "They were there, waiting for me. In the kitchen, on the couch, in my bed, near the window. The shadows of Jan and Yolanda never leave my apartment, like shameless guests who don't decide to leave" [1](Llobet 152). As such, her situation as survivor establishes her personal involvement in the disaster, much like the real-life status of Anais Llobet.

After realising that she is alive, Madel joins the company of other in the gym-turned-shelter. The kindness and hospitality of the Filipinos—even during a catastrophe—win her over. Madel is surprised when a mother, without a single trace of irony, interpellates her: "Welcome to the Philippines, ma'am. How is your trip?" (Llobet 24). And again: "You are our guest!" they say (Llobet 25). This is not the first time Madel is astonished by the Philippines, which she first experiences as "a destination for vacation, cheaper cocktails, but with clearer waters than elsewhere" (Llobet 66). As such, the Philippines is not only associated with catastrophe, but with hospitality, even in the most incongruous circumstances.

Moreover, the book looks beyond the Philippines by juxtaposing the Haiyan trauma vis-à-vis other trauma signifiers of the region. With a mix of sadness and irony, Madel remarks: "No people should be destined to die, sacrificed on the altar of climate change… These cataclysms are destined for other children, those from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia, those *who are used* to see their children die" [2] (Llobet 45-46, italics in the original). What is happening here, in fact, is a self-critique that Madel engages in because she realises her privilege of not living in a disaster prone area of the world. The italicised portion, “used to,” emphasises a climate trauma that is not for exceptional occasions only, as in Western contexts[1].

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[1] «Elles étaient là, à m'attendre. Dans la cuisine, sur le canapé, dans mon lit, près de la fenêtre. Les ombres de Jan et Yolanda ne quittent jamais mon appartement, comme des invités sans gêne qui ne se décident pas à partir». I was thinking of the option «guests who have overstayed their welcome" but this would not highlight the *non*-decision to leave or not.

[2] «Aucun peuple n'est destiné à mourir sacrifié sur l'autel du changement climatique … Ces cataclysmes sont destinés à d'autres enfants, ceux des Philippins, Sri Lankais, Indonésiens, *ceux qui ont l'habitude* de voir mourir leurs enfants».

This extract, also, once more, underscores the need to address climate change which, nowadays, has become a question of injustice within the scope of the environmental humanities. Places like the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Indonesia suffer from what Nixon has called “slow violence” (2011)[2]. Such condition, moreover, is made complex within “cultures of disaster” (Bankhoff 2003)[3].

Thus far, while Madel is portrayed as satisfying the criteria of PTSD survivors, she is also described as a critical survivor-witness as seen in her reflections on climate injustice and in her appreciation of Filipino hospitality. Certainly, falling in love with the tall Filipino aesthetic surgeon, Jan, and coming with him to his home in Tacloban, “tames” the foreignness of the French young woman.

The Protagonist as Indirect Witness-Listener

Once in the shelter, her skin colour, which Madel describes like that of “a weakening firefly,”[4] makes her stand out. Certainly, her notoriety, both as Jan’s girlfriend and as a reporter, has also made her conspicuous. Suddenly, in spite of her similar survivor status, others invest her with a new role: that of an indirect witness by listening to the story of others—not as source for her news reports, but out of empathy: “I listen to each wounded person’s version of their Yolanda” (Llobet 51)[5]. Notice the possessive pronoun “their,” specifying the uniqueness of each person’s story. Madel’s way of listening is rendered in a particular way through the form of the novel where some chapters are recounted solely from the first person point of view of other survivors. As such, one gets the impression that they speak for themselves rather than through Madel's voice, as if they are being offered agency. Of the 22 chapters of the novel, four are written in first-person point of view other than Madel's.

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[1] For example, E. Ann Kaplan, in her work, *Climate Trauma*, develops the notion of *pre-trauma* via her analysis of Hurricane Katarina. Against the more familiar Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which is a condition triggered in the present by past events, Pre-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PreTss) denotes a “fear of a future terrifying event of a similar kind” (Kaplan xix). However, societies that are used to cyclical typhoons and climate disasters – the Philippines experiences, on average, 20 typhoons a year – I wonder if pretrauma is appropriate to such contexts.

[2] “Rob Nixon calls climate change a form of ‘slow violence’ [which] occurs gradually and out of sight […] It is a ‘delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space’: although the effects are disastrous, they are played out across a range of temporal and spatial scales that mostly exceed the human scale” (Mertens and Craps 136).

[3] Greg Bankhoff’s term for “creative adaptation to environmental hazards in the Philippines” (2003).

[4] «Une luciole faiblissante» (23).

[5] «J’écoute les blessés me confier ‘leur Yolanda’» (51).

In Chapter Four, Madel "yields the stage" to Liliana who narrates, in four pages, her version of the disaster. Liliana, plagued by survivor's guilt, mourns her daughter Shoshanna and others. In Chapter ten, Jack, brother of Liliana and friend of Jan, tells his version of his loss. In Chapter thirteen, Rosie explains her new ad hoc job as scribe of the deceased. Finally, in Chapter eighteen, Teresa Cadingoyan, recounts the helplessness of an OFW trying to locate her home and family after the storm surge. The novel allows malleability of narration through these shifts in points of view. As such, it illustrates listening as "an act of attention that registers uniqueness of the other's narrative" (Couldry 9), as well as the possibility for "our stories"—in this case, Madel's—"as entangled with the stories of others" (Bassel 9) that create "new, wider spaces of participation where narrative resources are redistributed" (Bassel 65). Such a form also illustrates empathic unsettlement which separates Madel's voice from others, thus satisfying the non-diluted narration between listener and speaker. Madel's empathy will later make her question voyeurism, transforming her from a detached journalist to an unsettled empathic witness.

Liliana, Jack, Rosie and Teresa represent survivors from immediate families, friends, those who find themselves taking care of the dead. Indeed, the survivor "becomes witness and reaches beyond the individual into the consciousness of the community" (Frank 63-64), especially with the inclusion of Filipino diasporans like Teresa.

Furthermore, as seen in the examples of Rosie and Teresa, trauma is made more complex: Rosie is a direct receiver of traumatic tales, thus, a secondary witness. Teresa, while not a direct witness of the storm surge herself, has not only most probably lost her family, she has already has her share of suffering as an OFW. As such, not only is the sense of community and solidarity extended even to receivers and exiles, the novel resists a "hierarchy of victimisation"[1]. Different types of pain are included and presented in their own terms. Indeed, "survivors should not be denied the right to speak... simply because they cannot know the whole truth of an event" (Gilbert 60). Thus, cross-traumatic affiliation[1] is encouraged.

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[1] At times, to "have been a victim gives you the right to complain, to protest, and to make demands" (Todorov and Belos 143). See Fassin and Rechtman's *The Empire of Trauma: An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood* which traces the trajectory from suspicion of victimhood to one that even "excites sympathy and merits [financial] compensation" (5).

Moreover, the inclusion of Teresa enlarges the scope of the novel to transnational realities of Filipinos, thus also underscoring the global repercussion of climate change. However, if trauma demands justice in order for reparation to take place, then who is guilty? The novel gives us a hint: "*Storm surge*, said the radio, and we didn't understand that it meant a 'tsunami' instead… I want to put them on the benches of the accused and ask them why they couldn't translate two words that could have saved so many lives[2] (Llobet 47, italics in the original).

The above passage illustrates at least two issues that will be discussed shortly: on the one hand, Madel criticises the media– journalists like Madel herself – for their lack of clarity. On the other hand, the excerpt shows how bad translations can actually lead to death. Except for some counter-examples in *Les mains lâchées*, some journalists are portrayed as the "anti-listeners" which I shall explore in the next section.

Media as "Mislistener"

Madel is a foil to Herman, her editor; and to Irene, the camerawoman. Learning that his reporter finds herself in the thick of the catastrophe, Herman exclaims: "How lucky you're there![3]" not so much because Madel is alive, but more so because she can do the coverage for the news. He thus sends Irene to film the disaster.

External to the event, Irene becomes a consumer of "shocking images" as described by Madel: "The survivors watch the camera with curiosity and then turn away. Irene does not see them: she sees only their image in the frame ... 'Ask them questions', she whispers to me. I start but then Irene sharply cuts me off. She asks other questions, shorter, harder" (Llobet 61)[1]. Contrary to Madel's empathetic stance, Irene is reminiscent of Saïd's orientalist "watcher," fashioning the victims in her own image that make "climate disaster porn" sell.

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[1] According to Stef Craps, cross-traumatic affiliation encourages transcultural empathy in which two or more different cultures, which have undergone different types of traumas, seek to understand the other's trauma for their own sake and in their own terms (19). Elsewhere, I have elaborated on this concept as follows: "Cross traumatic affiliation is a disposition which allows one party to relate to the trauma of another based on the former's own trauma experience while, at the same time, recognising the uniqueness and difference of each culture's experience. By avoiding such homogenisation or dilution of two distinct experiences, one acknowledges pain according to the terms of that particular culture. Last but not least, cross-traumatic affiliation encourages solidarity independent of (political, financial, mediatised) justifications of one's "hierarchy" of victimhood" (Martin, *Manilaner's* 821). Therefore, cross-traumatic affiliation presupposes differentiation and solidarity. It suggests an ethical attitude which does not pit one trauma or victim status over another.

[2] «*Storm surge*, disait la radio, et nous n'avions pas compris qu'il fallait entendre 'tsunami'…. Je voudrais les mettre sur le banc des accusés, leur demander pourquoi ils n'ont pas su traduire deux mots qui auraient pu sauver tant de vies» (47).

[3] «Qu'elle chance de t'avoir sur place» (41).

Further, Martin Jay makes a distinction between what he calls the epistemological view and the ontological view. Whereas the former evokes spectatorial distance, objectification, an exclusionary and staring gaze; the latter is caring and aletheic. While the epistemological viewer is unethical; the ontological viewer situates himself within the visual field; he is embedded; not controlling (Oliver 125). In *Les mains lâchées*, Irene, clearly takes on the epistemological view.

Contrary to ethical and emphatic listening and witnessing, Irene fails to suspend her own framework and instead imposes her point of view in the service of knowledge/power. Thus, the interviewees are what Viet Thanh Nguyen calls as "misremembered" (2019)—they are neither forgotten nor remembered. However, they are present in the screen without speaking for themselves. Accordingly, I draw from Nguyen's idea to argue that Irene, who only sees "their image in the frame," also *mis*listens—when the receiver, in this case, Irene, the indirect witness, neither silences them—"ask them questions"—nor emphatically listens—she cuts off Madel, implying impatience to wait for the answers. Thus, on the screen, the interviewees are objectified. Emphatic listening, on the contrary, demands paraphrasing *their* narrative in *their* own terms, when appropriate.

The Novel as Medium of Witnessing

As if to emphasize the limits of media in trauma narratives, in the case of Llobet, again, she chose the literary form over the journalistic or legal one, which "rarely provides survivors with the freedom for personal expression" (Gilbert 55). Consequently, one can evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the novel. It is interesting that Llobet did not opt for the testimonial, the example *par excellence* of which is Primo Levi's *Si Questo è un Uomo* or Elie Wiesel's *La Nuit*. I can put forward at least three reasons that argue for fiction's advantage: Firstly, the malleability and length of the novel allow for coming-to-terms. Secondly, the possibility of figurative language in fiction permits what is immediately not expressible to be expressed. Thirdly, fiction affords Llobet the faculty of distancing, with the possibility of making Madel as the former's avatar.

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[1] «Les survivants observent le camera avec curiosité et puis détournent la tête. Irene ne les aperçoit pas: elle ne voit que leur image dans le cadre... «Pose-leur des questions», m›intime-t-elle. Je commence mais Irene me coupe d'un ton tranchant. Elle en pose d'autres, plus courtes, plus dures». See also pp. 60-65 and 81-82.

The other individual testimonies—those of Liliana, Jack, Rosie and Teresa—remind one of a collaborative text where "it is not always clear who is doing the actual *writing*" (Gilbert 130, emphasis in the original). Indeed, "the position of the collaborator is complex, often fulfilling several roles simultaneously: that of listener, secondary witness, writer and mediator" (Gilbert 130). However, fiction dispenses Llobet of the complications of collaboration, especially with post-trauma survivors. While "authenticity"—as first-hand direct witnessing—of the testimonial may come as an issue, one may simply argue that, by preferring the genre of the novel, Llobet was never after a testimonial in the first place.

Furthermore, interestingly, the chronology of the plot of *Les mains lâchées* is linear. Thus, it does not at all ascribe to postmodern aesthetics dear to early advocates of trauma fiction. The postmodern novel has become the preferred literary genre in early trauma studies where spectral presences, aporetic prose, nonlinear narratives, and temporal disruption, among others, abound (cf. Luckhurst 90). With the postcolonial turn of trauma studies, however, critics like Kali Tal (17) have warned against a mandatory and recent elitist use of postmodern aesthetics in order to highlight trauma, thus excluding other possible contexts. As such, *Les mains lâchées*, unwittingly perhaps, ascribes to the postcolonial trend in trauma studies. It responds more to Caruth's ethical goal for trauma studies, which, according to her, "may provide the very link between cultures" (*Unclaimed* 11).

Translation as Listening Again

Interestingly, in the context of *Les mains lâchées,* trauma and translation can be studied in the perspective of ethics and survival. Similar to trauma, translation can be perceived as an afterlife: "To cross the threshold from life to death and from death to afterlife is to be translated, to be in translation. Translation is the mode through which what is dead, disappeared, forgotten, buried, or suppressed overcomes its determined fate by being borne (and thus born anew) to other contexts across time and space" (Brodzki 6). Of course, Walter Benjamin was perhaps the first one to formulate this idea so eloquently in "The Task of the Translator," where "to survive" corresponds to two words in the German language: whereas "Überleben means above life—that this life referred to exceeds nature, biology, organic corporeality alone," "*Fortleben* means the prolonging of life. Übersetzen means, not surprisingly, translation" (Brodzki). Furthermore, in her seminal work, *Can These Bones Live?,* Bella Brodzki explains translation as a cultural practice and symbolic action, and above all as a process that extends life, but one that also prolongs the meaning traces of death-in-life, life after death, and life after life. Both bodies and texts harbour the prospect of living on in their own remarkable ways" (5). Consequently, the translator, in his or her task to prolong life, engages in ethical practice.

In *Les mains lâchées*, Llobet effectuates work of translation, whether it be interlingual – from Llobet's experiences mostly in English into French—or intralingual—Madel's "transcription" of the other survivors' tales. As such, there are several layers of attempts at "prolonging the lives" of the Yolanda survivors. On a self-reflexive note, I as reader and critique, also participate in this movement, in this "listening again" of excerpts into English.

Conclusion: A Call for a Reader-Witness

The reader of climate trauma then, or any testimonial for that matter, is also called to witnessing. Indeed, "to read is to witness" (Collins 14). The testimony invests the reader with a responsibility and a "duty to listen and to validate the survivor's story, just as the survivor of trauma has a duty to tell the story" (Gilbert 84).

Instead of coming full circle, the conclusion of *Les mains lâchées* unsettles the reader by reminding him or her that "Yolanda" is more than just a super typhoon: it is a politico-social problem: "[a] mix of political arrogance and badly relayed information have killed 6300 people, made 1061 persons disappear, not to mention the 28, 689 wounded and millions of displaced who lost everything" (151)[1].

Such realisation takes us back to the impetus of *Les mains lâchées*: Anaïs Llobet's way of making sense of the past by resorting to the novel as a more appropriate medium of recounting trauma. While the novel offers a critique of the risks of climate crisis pornography, through Madel, empathy, witnessing, and ethical listening are illustrated. Lastly, ethical listening is extended to include translation and the role of reader as another witness, especially in trauma literature.

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[1] «Un mélange d'arrogance politique et d'informations mal transmises a tué 6300 personnes, fait disparaître 1061 d'autres, sans compter les 28.689 blessés et les millions de déplacés qui ont tout perdu».

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