

Article

The Lotus at Dawn: Rethinking Climate Resilience in an Archipelago

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Abstract: Super Typhoon Rai, locally called Odette, hit the Philippines on December 16, 2021, devastating General Luna, a municipality in Surigao del Norte. Due to this natural disaster, this study—originally written as a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account via *flâneuserie*—endeavors to understand how the mobility of city dwellers contributes to the anthropogenic climate by exploring the ethics of care. Additionally, it seeks to posit inquiries on what it means to be climate-resilient in an archipelagic country such as the Philippines. Beyond economic methodologies, it is pivotal to examine issues of care that deal with our relationship with nature by understanding how, for example, mindful tourism is practiced in a community that experienced a tragic typhoon such as Typhoon Rai. Surely, the climate crisis’ temporal aspects make it more arduous to address, however, producing more philosophically-informed studies with ethics of care in a certain locus brings us closer to the possibility of a more empathetic and caring community. Like the sacred lotus, *Nelumbo nucifera*, that descends at night and blooms at dawn, the city, after grieving, looks forward to a rebirth by way of recognizing our moral responsibility and by employing approaches that are geared towards actual and real-life solutions.

Keywords: autoethnography, climate resilience, *flâneuserie*, tourism

As an archipelago, a group or an assembly of islands, the Philippines is home to impressive beaches that are almost always poetic. Coupled with the fact that we are surrounded by bodies of water is the reality that we are also vulnerable to disasters such as typhoons. On December 16, 2021, Super Typhoon Rai, Odette as we call it locally, hit the Philippines, and although it generally affected most provinces in the country, including Metro Manila, General Luna, a municipality in Surigao del Norte located in the southern part facing the Pacific Ocean and is considered a

tourist hub, experienced the calamity's worst threats and effects. As a category five, typhoon Odette made several landfalls, nine to be exact, that caused loss of electricity, limited communication, and a severely damaged airport that temporarily prevented people, especially tourists, from moving out of the island. The wrath of the typhoon led to not just these inconveniences but worse, to loss of life, at least nineteen individuals to be exact, most of them locals.¹

On account of this natural disaster, this study—originally written as a fragment that features a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account employing the concept of *flâneuserie*—endeavors to understand how the mobility of city dwellers contributes to the anthropogenic climate, particularly as tourists, by exploring the concept of care. Philosophizing on the city² is not just confined in the corners of the big cities but also, perhaps, extends to the city dwellers as subjects and how they, we, may affect or have affected our neighboring loci, such as the islands, in the context of the Philippine archipelago. To offer a definition of the archipelago, Robert Shields, a Canadian sociologist and cultural theorist, in his review of *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking*, posits that: “Archipelagoes are figures of connections and solidarity between peoples, places and species who have similar struggles [...] Archipelagoes are not only geographic but human and thus cultural [...] These archipelagos are where islands repeat but where each island is a rearticulation of the others.”³ This essay aims to establish how city dwellers' mobility impacts the lives of island dwellers, and how they reflect almost the same challenges of living in the Philippine archipelago.

Before a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account employing the concept of *flâneuserie* is presented, there are key terms, and their context, that must be introduced: The *flâneur* is the stroller that philosophizes on the city from an estranged point of view and surveys the street(s) as if it is a place of dwelling—as in Walter Benjamin's idiom, “The street becomes a dwelling for

¹ Neil Arwin Mercado, “Siargao death toll due to Typhoon Odette reaches 19, *INQUIRER.net* (22 December 2021), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1530774/siargao-death-toll-due-to-typhoon-odette-reaches-19-matugas>>.

² In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau refers to the walker as a city dweller who captures the image of the city through the act of walking: “[T]hey are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it.” In connection to this idea, this study refers to the city as the capital, the urban space, and the center, and is examined by discussing the impact of the city dwellers' mobility to its neighboring islands such as Siargao through the act of walking as method in autoethnography. See Michel de Certeau, “Walking in the City,” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. by Steven Rendall (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 93.

³ See Robert Shields, “Review: Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking,” *Space and Culture* (28 November 2020), <<https://www.spaceandculture.com/2020/11/28/review-contemporary-archipelagic-thinking/>>.

the *flâneur*; he is as much at home with the façades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls.” The *flâneuse*, on the other hand, refers to a female counterpart of the *flâneur*. *Flâneuserie* then essentially refers to a woman performing *flânerie*. According to Lauren Elkin in *Flâneuse*, *flâneuserie* “not only changes the way we move through space but intervenes in the organisation of space itself.”⁴

Other important terminologies consulted in this study are *dwelling* and *measure-taking* in the Heideggerian sense: terms that link man and earth, his place of *building* and *dwelling*. On the one hand, *dwelling* refers to a symbolic way of staying on earth which comes after one’s capacity to *build*. On the other hand, *measure-taking* summons a manner of gauging man’s existence on earth and his state of being finite vis-à-vis the infinite, that is represented by the sky. German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s essay on Friedrich Hölderlin is pivotal in this study as it inquires into man’s poetic *dwelling* and deconstructs Hölderlin’s poem where the title of one of the chapters – “...Poetically Man Dwells...” – was derived from. Heidegger essentially links the concept of *dwelling* to the *poetic* through understanding Hölderlin’s poetics:

This does not mean, though, that the poetic is merely an ornament and bonus added to dwelling. Nor does the poetic character of dwelling mean merely that the poetic turns up in some way or other in all dwelling. Rather, the phrase “poetically man dwells” says: poetry first causes dwelling to be dwelling. Poetry is what really lets us dwell. But through what do we attain to a dwelling place? Through building. Poetic creation, which lets us dwell, is a kind of building.⁵

Heidegger’s postulations on the *poetic* dwelling intrinsically provoke the argument between poetry, the *imagined* and *symbolic*, and dwelling, the *real*, by crossing the perceived reality of the poet from an ideal state of imagining. Although Heidegger’s manner of reading Hölderlin’s text is contextualized in the European setting, owing to the fact that the *flâneur* emerged from this cultural milieu, his contemplations on the *measure-taking* between sky and earth and the portrayal of the poet’s consciousness in terms of dwelling and space remain to be significant points of reference in this

⁴ Lauren Elkin, “Flâneuserie,” in *Flâneuse: Women Walk the City in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2016), 288.

⁵ Martin Heidegger, “Poetically Man Dwells,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc., 1971), 213.

study. To dwell poetically, man has to recognize the between and to look beyond the material. A street is not just a street but a street moving with the shadow of the sky. A walk is not just a walk but a way of looking and lingering, a state of being in between.

Lastly, drawing from the pre-pandemic autoethnographic account by employing *flâneuserie* and consulting terms such as *dwelling* and *measure-taking* in the Heideggerian sense, this study also explores the ethics of care in connection to the recent tragedy that the island witnessed. Caring, as posited by feminist philosopher Nel Noddings, is the foundation of morality, where there is one “caring” and one that is “cared-for.”⁶ In addition, philosopher Virginia Held states that, “a fundamental premise of care ethics is that morality should address issues of caring and empathy and relationships between people rather than only or primarily the rational decisions of solitary moral agents.”⁷ Caring, although closely linked to vulnerability, appears more to be an act of courage. Furthermore, caring practices also involve resistive practices that can even establish solidarity in the community.

Essentially, this study employs the method of autoethnography to incorporate personal and experiential accounts vis-à-vis understanding the dynamics of care. Specifically, the methodology employed in the pre-pandemic account is anchored on Mary Louise Pratt’s concept and definition of autoethnography from her work *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Pratt goes on to say that:

a “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among... travelers and “travelees,” not in terms of separateness...but in terms of copresence, interaction, and interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power.⁸

A ‘contact’ allows not just interaction between subjects, but it also works as a space where they can recognize their correlation with one another by way of determining habits, practices, and structure, as also underscored in one of the objectives of the ethics of care. The locus involved in this study

⁶ See Mark Smith, “Nel Noddings, The ethics of care and education,” in *The Encyclopedia of Pedagogy and Informal Education* (2004, 2020, 2024), <<https://infed.org/mobi/nel-noddings-the-ethics-of-care-and-education/>>.

⁷ Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁸ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2007), EPUB.

is regarded as a contact zone—both a space of navigation and a text that serves as the main avenue of discourse as the *flâneuse* meanders and, ultimately, undergoes a process of meaning-making.

A Pre-Pandemic Sojourn

To introduce General Luna as the main locus in this study, here is a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account that exhibits the state of the island before Typhoon Odette:

At 5:00 am, the streets of General Luna come to life; residents and visitors alike rise with the sun as they carry their boards and walk their way to Cloud 9, the famed surf spot that made Siargao Island a known destination for local and foreign travelers. Here, people can be seen on their motorbikes with boards attached to their surf racks, or just island dwellers or tourists walking to a café.

Located in southern Philippines, Siargao lies in Mindanao facing the Pacific Ocean, home to scenic reef breaks patronized by surfers, both local and foreign. Since this island can be easily perceived as both a surfers' and non-surfers' paradise, it takes several attempts of knowing the place in-depth to reach a state of arrival and to root oneself as this appears to be too surreal for home: huge waves, young coconuts almost everywhere, panoramic view of the ocean.

General Luna, a municipality in Surigao del Norte, is one of the busiest areas in Siargao since this is where the Tourism Road is located. In my several visits here, I have always stayed in General Luna, the most convenient location where one can access the fruit market, surfboard shops, cafés, and a few more essentials, where most of my *flâneuserie* took place.

It was a slow Sunday morning; the neighboring lodging places were taking a rest from an eventful Saturday night. From the backroad in one of the unnamed streets of Catangnan, where the hostel was located, I had to walk to get to the main road. By foot, it takes five minutes to get to the concrete road; on the way to a café to grab a usual macchiato with coconut milk—a staple ingredient in the island—I had a rare encounter with a goat and a cat playing on the side of the road while snacking on grass for breakfast. I paused and took a photo of them staring at me as I interrupted their morning habit.

I walked further and reached the main road; here, houses on the side give life to the road of Catangnan. It was around 9:00 in the morning and the Sunday mass just ended. Of the many times I have been here, it was one of the unusual moments when I saw children clothed in formal attire—collared shirts, slacks, leather shoes—coming out of the church, running and with big

grins on their faces as they run to the beachside to have early lunch with their families. It is, after all, the people of Siargao who made this place a paradise.

It is in these moments of *flânesuerie* that I become more aware of my walk and of a deeper connection with the space I am traversing. One's walk, then, speaks a lot about not just the space the individual is occupying but the journey into the self as she translates her encounters and experiences. This brings me to Angela Manalang-Gloria's poem "Old Maid Walking on a City Street":

She had a way of walking through concupiscence
And past the graces her fingers never twirled:
Because her mind refused the heavy burden,
Her broad feet shoveled up the world.⁹

Angela Manalang-Gloria's work typically involves a female subject or speaker, and often, the woman is portrayed as solitary, unaccompanied, and independent. In this poem, for instance, Manalang-Gloria presents the figure "walking through concupiscence" and exuding a strong sense of self-control as she seems to have full authority of her movement, even the twirling of her fingers. The character seemed to be immovable and unbothered by her solitude as she "refused the heavy burden" and went on with her daily habit—or her life, in general—and "shoveled up the world" just like how a *flâneuse* ignores the threats as she meanders and negotiates her presence in streets.

Although this poem generally describes an old maid and a picture of her daily life, the character's manner of walking resonates with the method of perambulation by the *flâneuse*. The female walker almost always radiates independence in her solitude as this allows time and space for her musing and interventions in her walks. Similarly, *flâneuserie* does not just merely involve a way of walking but it necessitates an act of detachment, for when the female walker is too aware and too absorbed with events that are happening at once in one place, certain signs might be missed that can potentially contribute to the meaning-making in her encounters.

In line with this fragment, this poem by Manalang-Gloria echoes Janet Wolff's statement in "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity," as she asserts that, "although the solitary and independent life of the *flâneur* was not open to women, women clearly *were* active and visible

⁹ Angela Manalang-Gloria, *The Complete Poems* ed. by Edna Zapanta Manlapaz (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1993).

in other ways in public arena.”¹⁰ This goes to say that the female *flâneur* does not just exist in shopping malls and in safe arcades, but in other loci as well such as the unnamed streets of island municipalities.

These encounters then—of getting lost in small towns and eventually ending up buying *pan de coco*, of walking in dark backroads to reach the Lotus Shores yoga dojo—somehow fill what was missing then in the literary accounts of female walkers as the *flâneuse* now appears in the public arena. Furthermore, this account also debunks the limited notion of *flâneuserie* in the metropolis as the female walker explores the outskirts of Manila and searches for possible spaces for solitary walking and, ultimately, comes into contact with opposing and connecting images of the street.

On Climate Resilience, Mindful Tourism, and Community Building as Form of Care

Fast forward to 2021, five years after this fragment was written, the site that has been previously described drastically changed. At least 208 Filipinos were displaced, and worse, killed, after the Super Typhoon Rai, Odette as we call it locally, hit our country, especially the regions of Visayas and Mindanao. In particular, houses and even the airport in Siargao Island were destroyed, trees were uprooted, people lost their access to electricity and potable water; the once carefree dwellers of the tropical paradise suddenly turned into climate refugees.

In 2011, there were plans in the same province to build a model community that is climate change-resilient called Ecotown. An Ecotown is “a planning unit composed of municipalities, or a group of municipalities located within and around boundaries of critical key biodiversity areas, which are at high risk to climate change.”¹¹ However, in 2021, the tourist hub of the island did not prove to be climate change resilient when it was hit by the super typhoon Odette.

Although this study will not dive deep into existing policies and economic methodologies, it aims to emphasize that understanding the concept of anthropogenic climate change from a philosophical perspective allows us to engage in a critical understanding of the world and our role as humans in caring for our home, *our only home*. How is a particular site even considered climate-resilient, for example?

¹⁰ Janet Wolff, “The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity,” in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, 2:3 (1985), <<https://doi.org/10.1177/02632764850020030>>.

¹¹ See Climate Change Commission, *Ecotown Demonstration Framework* (n.d.), <<https://climate.gov.ph/files/ECOTOWN.pdf>>.

It is even more vital to discuss, being in an archipelagic country, how mobility in the city affects life on the outskirts and how it contributes to the anthropogenic climate crisis as it is part of our moral responsibility to mindfully arrive and *dwell* as tourists, as visitors.

After years of restrictions in mobility during the pandemic, people were more than eager to get back to traveling to make up for lost time, giving rise to a frenzy of “revenge travel” and causing a heavy influx of tourists in many cities and further increasing the global carbon footprint. While it may be easy to blame airlines for adding flights to maximize profit, the issue is more complex. It also raises critical questions about how we prioritize the welfare and cultural preservation of local communities, as well as how we behave and consume as tourists.

This is perhaps where the concept of *mindful tourism* comes into play. I do not refer to mindful tourism, however, from the perspective of Buddhist philosophy but mindfulness as in the state of being aware of the present and being able to recognize the impact of our mobility and consumption, as tourists, in smaller and vulnerable islands. In Siargao, for example, there have been initiatives by locals and tourists alike (those who eventually decided to reside in the island), even before the island was hit by Typhoon Odette, to practice proper waste management (to illustrate, if you walk along the tourism road, you will see used yet clean plastic packaging and wrappers hung in clothesline, instead of actual clothes, in front of their houses since they can exchange these for some items like toiletries and school supplies for kids in their waste management center). There is also an abundance of vegan options there, although not as affordable in other cities, say like those in Vietnam. In addition, *Lokal Lab*,¹² a grassroots NGO in Siargao, aims to shape a model sustainable island by employing regenerative design and creating livelihood especially for women (i.e. they train housewives to weave and create native baskets that can in turn be used for sustainable shopping by the community).

As city dwellers who witnessed how our mobility and excess, as tourists, affect the lives of people who dwell in islands, such as Siargao, it is our moral responsibility to be mindful of the way we care for our shared home. *But through what do we attain, again, to a dwelling place?* If we contribute in building a community that understands practices of care, by way of critical thinking and writing but also through actual practice and involvement in community efforts, it is already a form of *building, a poetic creation*, if you may. And it is through this building that allows us to dwell.

From a pre-pandemic autoethnographic account of my walk, flâneuserie in Siargao, to a post-pandemic rethinking of the ethics of care and

¹² For more information about Lokal Lab, see <https://www.lokallab.org>.

how it shapes our communities, my definition and understanding of *dwelling* transfigures from solitary to collective.

Surely, the temporal aspects of the climate crisis and fragmented agencies are challenges that have to be dealt with. However, producing more philosophically-informed studies and dealing with ethics of care in a certain locus brings us closer to the possibility of a more empathetic and caring community.

Healing as Emancipatory

The climate crisis is here. What is the kind of world that we imagine leaving behind so that the next generation can *live*? The more important question now is how can we show up for each other and how can we care, especially to the most vulnerable? Like the sacred lotus, *nelumbo nucifera*, that descends at night and blooms at dawn, the city, after grieving, looks forward to a rebirth by way of recognizing our moral responsibility and by employing approaches that are geared towards actual and real-life solutions.

In connection to this concluding point, here are a few lines from *Birth Land* by Brandy Nalani McDougall, poet laureate of Hawaii, titled “Water Remembers”:

This is not the end of civilization but
A return to one. Only the water insisting
On what it should always have, spreading
its liniment over infected wounds. Only
The water rising above us, reteaching us
Wealth and remembering its name.¹³

To recognize that forms of care are also forms of healing, we liberate ourselves by way of intervening and resisting existing practices that do not allow us to *dwel*. For example, are existing climate resilience projects in islands beneficial to the locals and are these really a part of a movement towards genuine solidarity OR do they simply happen to bring in more profit for the local government and other partner agencies? The water remembers because it is a witness to our vulnerability as humans; when we recognize that we are connected, that the relationship of the one who “cares” and the one who is “cared for” is reciprocal, we become more mindful of our actions, we become resilient as a community in the most genuine sense. We are not

¹³ Brandy Nalani McDougall, *Aina Hanau/Birth Land* (Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 2023).

just city dwellers, after all, but dwellers of the archipelago, *each island a rearticulation of the other*.

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