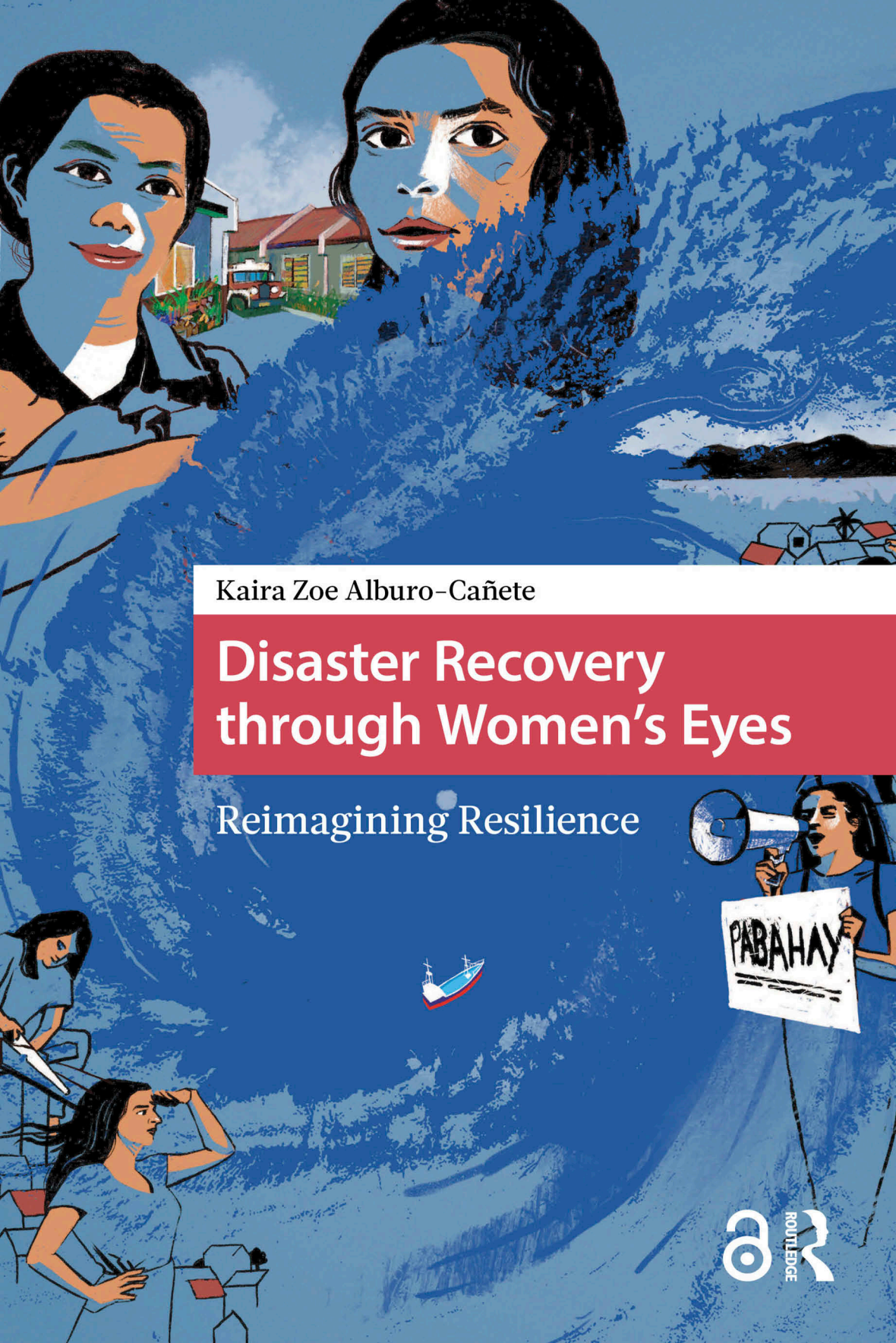


The book cover features a vibrant, stylized illustration in shades of blue, orange, and white. At the top, two large portraits of women are shown. The woman on the left is smiling, while the woman on the right has a more serious expression. Below them, a small boat is visible on the water. In the bottom left corner, a woman is depicted looking out at the sea. In the bottom right corner, a woman is shown holding a megaphone and a sign that reads 'PABAHAY'. The background is a textured blue wash.

Kaira Zoe Alburo-Cañete

Disaster Recovery through Women's Eyes

Reimagining Resilience

 ROUTLEDGE

Disaster Recovery through Women's Eyes

This book (re)centers women's situated knowledges as a powerful starting point for analyzing disaster recovery and rethinking the contested concept of resilience. Through an ethnographic account of reconstruction following Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines, it demonstrates how women's everyday negotiations with loss and personal aspirations form new imaginaries of recovery grounded in a feminist ethics of care.

Disaster Recovery through Women's Eyes offers readers a conceptual understanding of resilience as "lived" and entangled in processes of becoming – directly challenging conventional, often neoliberal, frameworks of recovery. It delivers these insights through evocative writing coupled with women's photo-mediated narratives. By focusing on women's everyday practices, embodied labors, and emotional relations, the book draws attention to how recovery is a work of creation, self-formation, and hope amidst loss. This approach provides readers with a lens to view resilience as an open project constantly in the making, offering a critical alternative to technocentric models and a grounded basis for more ethical, "care-full" reconstruction practices.

This book is intended for scholars and students in disaster studies, gender studies, anthropology, development, and environmental studies. Its photo-based methodology will also interest those working with creative social science methods. Crucially, this work provides critical insights for practitioners and policymakers rethinking how communities are governed during and after disasters and how to incorporate perspectives of care in recovery programs.

Kaira Zoe Alburo-Cañete is a Filipino feminist scholar grounded in Anthropology and Critical Development Studies. Her work examines the everyday politics and ethics of living with, responding to, and recovering from disasters and other forms of crisis.

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Disaster Recovery through Women's Eyes

Reimagining Resilience

Kaira Zoe Alburo-Cañete

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Introduction

Encountering Resilience in Uncertain Times

A Typhoon Called Yolanda

Yolanda destroyed everything. I really thought it was the end of Tacloban. I have lived here all my life, but I could not recognize this place anymore ... I asked myself, how do we recover from this?

(Cecilia, typhoon Yolanda survivor)¹

In the early hours of November 8, 2013, a ‘super typhoon’ made landfall in the Philippines at peak strength. It left in its wake extensive destruction across the central Philippine islands: over 6,000 fatalities, a million homes destroyed, and about four million displaced among 16 million people affected. Tacloban, a highly urbanized city with a population of over 200,000, bore the brunt of the typhoon. Storm surges² reaching 7 meters high destroyed entire settlements and vital infrastructure and claimed thousands of lives, mostly from urban poor coastal communities. Cecilia, quoted in the epigraph, was from one of these communities washed out by the waves. The world knew this super typhoon, which earned the title of the most powerful storm on record, as Haiyan. In the Philippines, this storm was known by another name: Yolanda.³

I first arrived in Tacloban in 2017 to study post-Yolanda reconstruction. The city appeared to be an ordinary bustling urban environment. What greeted me were the familiar sights, sounds, and smells of tricycles, jeepneys, and cars plying their way through narrow streets; of people buying and selling fish, vegetables, and other wares in the public market; of construction works carried out in different parts of the city. The more time I spent walking around Tacloban’s busy streets, however, the more I started to notice the extent to which the disaster had inscribed itself onto its landscape.

Looking closely, one would notice the waterline – a faded stain reaching up to two storeys high – that still marked the façade of buildings in the downtown area. New buildings and destroyed ones stood side by side. The bare shorelines, which used to be densely populated communities, offered fragmented clues of previous habitation. Signs saying “WARNING: Storm Surge Prone Area” were plastered across these coastal areas. Mural paintings depicting devastation and delivery of aid were found in various parts of the city. Jeepneys donning

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2 Disaster Recovery through Women's Eyes

colorful decals that spelled “Yolanda” were frequently spotted. A local *carenderia*, or eatery, named Yolanda became a popular site for both local and international tourists. *Na-Yolanda kami* (literally translated as “We were Yolanda-ed”) was a common phrase I would hear people say to express the impact of Yolanda on their lives. Evidently, Yolanda was no longer simply the name of a typhoon. Ubiquitous in both tangible and intangible ways, it was simultaneously a signifier of a defining experience, of an identity as disaster-affected people, and of a condition which continued to shape their collective memory and understanding of themselves and their communities following the disaster.

This book is not about how Yolanda destroyed Tacloban. While destruction is certainly a significant backdrop of the story I am about to tell, this book is about how futures are being forged in the aftermath of Yolanda, as seen through the eyes of women like Cecilia. It is about the question she posed upon seeing Tacloban's destruction, with the uncertainty and anxiety she felt as she contemplated life after disaster: *how do we recover?*

I met Cecilia in one of the resettlement areas I visited in Tacloban North, roughly 13 to 15 kilometers from the city center. She had been living in the resettlement village for over a year. A key component of Tacloban's strategy for recovery was a massive relocation project that aimed at resettling around 90,000 people from coastal “danger zones” to the city's northern fringes. This was in line with the city government's vision of becoming a resilient city. While disaster experts, urban planners, policymakers, and aid organizations had a straightforward answer to the question of *how to recover* – reduce risk through relocation, “build back better,” and ultimately achieve resilience – I pondered on what being rebuilt for the “better” meant for Cecilia. How did her experiences and views figure in the grand designs for building resilient futures? Could her experiences, alongside the experiences of other women affected by the disaster, help tell a different story of recovery and what it entails?

I begin with an assertion that women's situated knowledges and their everyday, embodied, and emotional experiences of disaster recovery are a powerful starting point for examining current organized practices through which disaster-affected communities are being rebuilt and governed – practices that find articulation through the concept of *resilience*. It is now well known that in many disaster contexts, women play a crucial role in family and community recovery (Baroy & Wu, 2023; Bradshaw, 2001; Enarson, 2012; Ramalho, 2019). And yet, knowledge production about recovery has rarely seen the reconstruction process from women's perspectives. In privileging women's narratives and experiences, however, my aim is not only to provide an account of women's experiences of loss, displacement, and their journey toward recovery. More importantly, from their standpoint, my inquiry focuses on what we might learn (or need to unlearn) from the ways communities' resilience is being built after a disaster. In line with feminist research traditions, analyzing disaster recovery from the standpoint of women carries with it the political commitment of creating possibilities for exploring and reclaiming alternative post-disaster futures (Enarson, 2012; see also Gibson-Graham, 2005). In this light, the central

question I engage with in this book is: *what possibilities for re-imagining resilience do women's experiences of recovery reveal?*

Rebuilding for the “better” or making communities more “resilient” are not benign concepts. They hold ideological baggage that prescribes specific ways of knowing and responding to risks, and *how to live* as resilient subjects. Often-times, these prescribed ways of living – intimately linked with neoliberal modes of governance (Bracke, 2016b; Joseph, 2013; Tierney, 2015) – are at odds with the embodied realities and lifeways of people targeted for resilience-building. In many cases, in the process of advancing resilience, disaster interventions have often enacted forms of violence and dispossession among those they purport to help (Barrios, 2016; Davoudi, 2018). I position women's everyday embodied realities as an intellectual-political-ethical site for disrupting these powerful circuits of knowledge and practice as well as a means through which (resilient) recovery can be redefined.

The profound devastation and the lingering questions of recovery in Tacloban take on even greater significance when viewed against a backdrop of escalating global insecurity, uncertainty, and risk. Indeed, the pervasive circulation of news and images depicting devastation, catastrophe, and humanitarian crises worldwide not only reflects but also amplifies a collective anxiety surrounding the increasing precarity and violence that seem to mark the times. The catastrophic impact of Yolanda in the Philippines, notably framed as a harbinger of future disasters (Compton, 2018; Walsh, 2013), exemplifies this sense of foreboding within the context of a rapidly changing climate.

The imperative to create a *new state of normalcy* (Mannakkara et al., 2014) driven by the impulse to reshape and govern the present in anticipation of future threats has dominated current discourses of disaster risk management, disaster recovery, climate change adaptation, and development more broadly (Rose & Lentzos, 2017; Rosenberg & Harding, 2005; Zeiderman, 2016). It is perhaps no surprise that resilience – commonly regarded as the ability of individuals, communities, and systems to absorb and cope with shocks and stresses (Klein et al., 2007; United Nations, 2015) – has come to figure so centrally in development policy and practice as well as in humanitarian interventions over the last 20 years (Clinton, 2006; Daly, 2016; Hilhorst, 2018; Nightingale, 2015; Tierney, 2015). Indeed, in Tacloban, resilience had been the rallying cry for all coordinated efforts undertaken by the state, humanitarian organizations, and local organizations for “building back better” (Eadie, 2019; Walch, 2018). Resilience becomes appealing, if not seductive, precisely because it circulates optimism regarding our ability to deal with uncertainty. In other words, resilience addresses a perceived and felt need to manage the modern world's problematic present in light of an unpredictable and risky future (Rose & Lentzos, 2017; see also Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; Giddens & Pierson, 1998).

Despite its generally optimistic and positive connotation, resilience is heavily contested. Far from being simply an idealized outcome or aspiration, it is intensely political, value-laden, and clearly linked to issues of equity, justice, and epistemological privilege (Davoudi, 2012; Fainstein, 2015; Harrison &

Chiroro, 2016). Who defines and problematizes different forms of risk? Who articulates what gets to be called “resilience”? How is one to apprehend risk and be made “resilient”? Which and whose futures are valued over others? These questions appropriately draw attention to the ideological, political, and ethical underpinnings that are embodied by current deployments of resilience. There has been, for me, a disturbing trend in employing techno-managerial approaches to reduce risks and enhance resilience – providing technical solutions to people’s most intimate problems and sufferings in the context of crisis (see Alburo-Cañete, 2014). Those dominant approaches to resilience have also given rise to a particular ethic that impresses upon the vulnerable the responsibility to overcome their own vulnerability and become resilient (Nightingale, 2015). Resilience therefore is simultaneously regarded as a value and as a set of values that prescribe specific forms of subjective orientations, aspirations, and ethical formations (Rose & Lentzos, 2017).

I share many of the concerns raised by critical scholars (see, for example, Bracke, 2016a; Chandler, 2013; Joseph, 2013; Tierney, 2015), who have contested the notion of resilience, specifically in terms of how it has been applied to maintain rather than challenge unjust systems that play a significant role in risk creation (see Chapter 1). Hence, rather than pursuing a “new normal,” resilience is said to *further* normalize and entrench existing structures of power and inequality in the ways situations of crisis are governed. In such conceptualizations of resilience, its incompatibility with transformative change and resistance – concepts that are so central to social justice movements – is often foregrounded (see Evans & Reid, 2013).

While these critical perspectives offer important insights into the potential pitfalls and political implications of mainstream resilience frameworks, I find it equally important to explore how resilience – as a situated, multifaceted, culturally grounded capacity for maintaining life – manifests and is enacted in the everyday lives and embodied realities of those facing adversity (Harris et al., 2017; Kothari & Arnall, 2019; Scheper-Hughes, 2008). Notwithstanding the merit of such critiques, it is important to acknowledge how resilience has also many times been appropriated and reclaimed by people experiencing crisis. In her article, “Everyday Resilience as Resistance,” Caitlin Ryan (2015) demonstrates how Palestinian women’s practices of *sumud* – their adaptation to the difficulties of life under Israeli occupation – in fact constitute tactics of resistance embedded in qualities of resilience. Similarly, Sou (2022) elucidates “resilience from below” wherein people’s resilient behaviors in response to Hurricane Maria, specifically women’s enactments of resilience and care in the domestic space, are framed as a form of defiance to US-Puerto Rico colonial relations. The book, *Resilience and the Brown Babe’s Burden* (Llanera, 2024), which features the writings of Filipina scholars on resilience in the Philippine context, also brings to light how adaptation, endurance, care, and resistance flow from everyday navigations of adversity.

Building on these views on resilience as resistance and particularly inspired by Scheper-Hughes’s (2008) emphasis on resilience as an active process rooted

in cultural, social, and emotional resources, I offer a reconceptualization of resilience as *lived*. This framework moves beyond seeing resilience as merely apprehending vulnerability. Instead, it highlights how resilience involves the continuous deployment of diverse “tactics” – including acts of everyday resistance – that are deployed against technocratic governance and structural inequality. This lived resilience, rooted in emotional navigation, active self-fashioning, and relational strategies, is deeply entangled with specific cultural and social norms. It acknowledges that life simultaneously embodies both vulnerability and resilience and recognizes the intrinsic human potential to live meaningfully and sustain life even where trauma and violence are persistent features. By centering the perspectives of women considered “vulnerable” – a term that I employ as a political standpoint rather than as a reference to any inherent qualities of vulnerability, as discussed further in Chapter 1 (see also Butler, 2016; von Meding, 2021) – the book illuminates the forms of adaptations that people craft amidst crisis, uncovers opportunities for political agency that contests the logics of governing institutions, and foregrounds the importance of care relations for sustaining life and recovery. This effort culminates in a mandate for systemic accountability among the state, humanitarian agencies, and other formal institutions in rebuilding lives and communities with *care* as a central ethos.

Through this *lived resilience* perspective (Chapter 5), I highlight how paths of resilience (rather than *to* resilience) unfold in and through complex gendered, political, affective, and ethical terrains in continuous processes of becoming. Following Gibson-Graham (2005, p. 14), I undertake this project in order to empower a potentially transformative notion of resilience – one that disrupts linear notions of change and highlights everyday navigations, negotiations, and relationality. The enactments of resilience, as seen through women’s eyes, highlight the notion that recovery is not simply about bouncing back or adapting to new norms dictated by powerful institutions. Rather, the intricate processes of survival, adaptation, and hopeful endeavors for recovery often involve active critical engagement with, and resistance to, dominant recovery models.

I ground my analysis in philosophies of care which have been central to feminist theorizing on various dimensions of life – from the domains of the home and community, to socio-ecological relations, to the sphere of international relations and security (Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018; Gilligan, 1993; Noddings, 2001; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017; Robinson, 2008; Ruddick, 1989; Tronto, 1993; Wichterich, 2015). To view resilience as “lived” requires the broadening of our ethico-ontological horizons to view “resilient” recovery as a process of becoming – not simply driven by the goal to rebuild what has been damaged, but as a *regenerative practice* anchored on an understanding of the centrality of care, interdependence, and mutual responsibility in disaster recovery. Crucially, this perspective extends beyond individual and community practices to demand the cultivation of caring institutions (see Albuero-Cañete, 2024; Tronto, 2010) that share accountability and actively enable relations of co-responsibility and reciprocity, rather than merely devolving the burden of resilience onto affected populations.

Situating Resilience in Post-Yolanda Tacloban

The Philippines already prominently figured in the global imagination as one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, even before Yolanda. Like its Southeast Asian neighbours, the Philippines is a country dominated by water (Bankoff, 2003). It is an archipelago made up of more than 7,000 islands, with a coastline of 36,289 kilometers. The frequency of calamitous events that take place in the Philippines has often been attributed to the country's geophysical features and exposure to a range of naturally occurring hazards. The country is situated in the Pacific ring of fire, a seismically active belt of volcanos and tectonic plate boundaries found along the Pacific Rim. Thus, earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions constitute part of the Philippine hazardscape.

While the country is exposed to a wide range of hazards, no other natural hazard causes as much damage in the Philippines as typhoons and their epiphenomena, such as floods, storm surges, and landslides (Warren, 2016a). Typhoons are meteorological events that develop over the north-western Pacific Ocean.⁴ As the Philippines lies to the west of the Pacific Ocean, it is found within Typhoon Alley, a 1,600-kilometer-wide corridor of open sea that stretches between the Philippines and southern Japan (Bankoff 2016, p. 338; Warren, 2016b, p. 111). Typhoon Alley is where the densest concentration of storms in the world develops and where those storms pass through. Hence, an average of 20 typhoons enter the Philippines annually with wind speeds that reach well over 200 kilometers per hour. Around six to nine of these typhoons eventually make landfall in the archipelago (Gaillard, 2015; Warren, 2016a).

Tacloban is the capital city of the Province of Leyte, in the Eastern Visayas Region of the Philippines (Figure 0.1). As such, it is the center for commerce, trade, education, communication, and technology in the region (Eadie, 2019; Ong et al., 2016). In 2008, it was classified as a "highly urbanized city" – a designation afforded to cities in the Philippines that have a population of at least 200,000 and an annual revenue of at least Php 50 million (approximately US\$1.03 million).⁵

Water is a dominant feature of Tacloban, a port city located at the crux of a funnel-shaped coastline where the eastern coast of the island of Leyte meets the southern coast of the island of Samar. The city is surrounded by several bays, namely, Anibong Bay and Panalaron Bay to the north; and Cancabato Bay, San Pedro Bay, and San Pablo Bay to the east. Tacloban faces east, toward the open Pacific Ocean. Much of its land is low-lying, with a mean elevation of only 3.05 meters above sea level (Muir-Wood, 2013; TACDEV, 2014).

Tacloban, like the rest of the Philippines, is no stranger to typhoons. Indeed, Eastern Visayas is known to be one of the most typhoon-exposed areas in the country. Forty percent of typhoons that enter the country pass through this region (TACDEV, 2014). *Bagyo*, as typhoons are referred to locally, are therefore very much part of people's lives in Tacloban and are not particularly regarded as exceptional events. Yolanda, however, was not a typical typhoon, even by Tacloban's standards of typhoons, which often had wind speeds that ranged from 118–220 kilometers per hour (TACDEV, 2014).⁶



Figure 0.1a Location of Tacloban City, the Philippines: (a) general view

Categorized as a “super typhoon,” Yolanda decimated much of Tacloban’s southern coastal areas (see Figure 0.2). These areas were the most densely populated places of the city, where most commercial establishments, businesses, schools, healthcare facilities, and government offices were located. Yolanda had devastating consequences for the city. More than 40,000 houses were destroyed either partially or completely, all private and public hospitals were heavily affected, and about 90 percent of all educational facilities were badly damaged (TACDEV, 2014). Tacloban accounted for 2,671 of the 6,293 deaths that were officially reported (NDRRMC, 2013). Most fatalities came from informal settlements situated on the coast. According to a report published by the University of the Philippines Nationwide Operational Assessment of Hazards Center (UP NOAH), at least 31,478 informal settlers were exposed to the storm surges, 8.4 percent of whom were estimated to have perished (Lagmay et al., 2013).



Figure 0.1b Location of Tacloban City, the Philippines: (b) specific view
Source: Author.

The extent of the damage and loss brought about by Yolanda in the Philippines placed the issue of climate change and the need to address climate-related risks on center stage. News about Yolanda captured public attention – locally and globally – for several weeks. Yolanda then became heralded as a “sign of what’s to come in a warmer world” (Walsh, 2013, p. 20).

The occurrence of the typhoon coincided with the opening of the UN Annual Climate Change Conference held in Poland that year. Then Philippine Climate Change Commissioner Naderev Saño, who himself hails from Tacloban City, gave an impassioned speech urging world leaders to take action:

With an apparent cruel twist of fate, my country is being tested by this hellstorm called Super Typhoon Haiyan, which has been described by experts as the strongest typhoon that has ever made landfall in the course

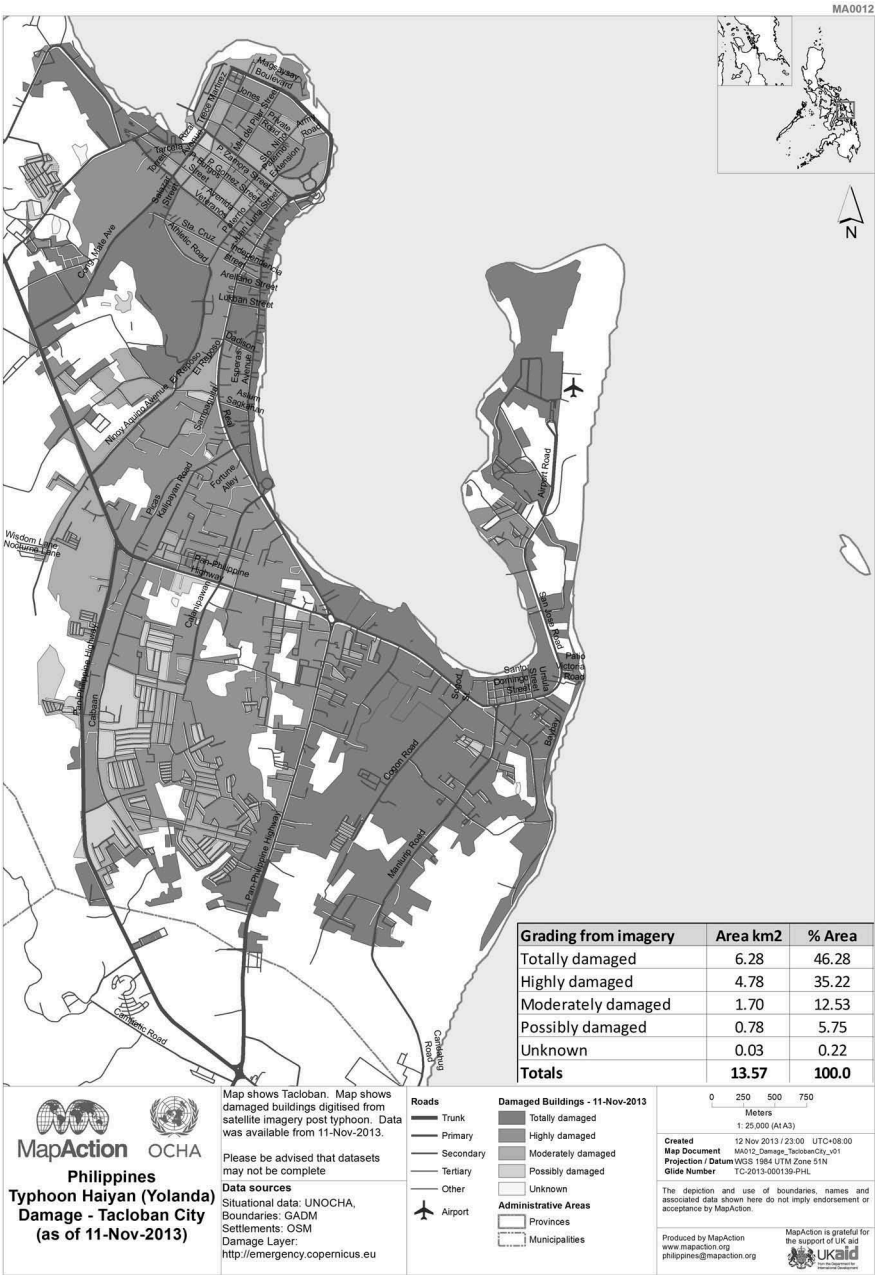


Figure 0.2 Map of typhoon Yolanda damage in Tacloban City
Source: MapAction and UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). <https://maps.mapaction.org/dataset/224-3012>

of recorded human history ... The picture in the aftermath is ever so slowly coming into clearer focus. The devastation is colossal ... To anyone who continues to deny the reality that is climate change, I dare you to get off your ivory tower and away from the comfort of your armchair ... This will have profound implications on many of our communities, especially those who struggle against the twin challenges of the development crisis and the climate change crisis. Typhoons such as Yolanda (Haiyan) and its impacts represent a sobering reminder to the international community that we cannot afford to procrastinate on climate action.

(Saño, 2013)

This narrative of Yolanda as an exemplar of the impacts of already-happening climate change brought to the world's attention the importance of having a focused international effort to address global warming. At the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction and Management, which was held in Manila with the theme "Post-Haiyan/Yolanda – A Way Forward," the *Tacloban Declaration* was formulated. This document was later presented at the Third UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction in Sendai, Japan, in 2015.

The Tacloban Declaration affirmed the role of the state in addressing large-scale disasters and emphasized the importance of international cooperation. *Building Back Better*, which would later be articulated as a key priority in the 2015 Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (United Nations, 2015), was identified as an imperative for building the resilience of communities affected by disasters. With the Tacloban Declaration, the city gained status not only as a city devastated by the most powerful storm on earth, but also as a project for promoting Build Back Better as the principle for resilient disaster recovery.

As all eyes focused on how Tacloban would rebuild itself after Yolanda, the city government – in partnership with international and local organizations, the private sector, and UN agencies – pooled together their expertise to re-design Tacloban as a "model resilient city" in the Philippines (TACDEV, 2014). A new vision was created for Tacloban's future: to make Tacloban "resilient, vibrant, and livable" (City Planning and Development Office, 2017). In response to the call to rebuild for the better, one of the top priorities of the state was to relocate informal settler communities which had occupied areas now commonly referred to as danger zones, to reduce exposure to future risks.

With the aim of building back better from the ruins left behind by Yolanda, Tacloban had been positioned as an exemplary center (Kusno, 2010) of resilience and modernity.⁷ As such, the reconstruction of the city relied on the creation of a spectacle of order, development, and renewal. Situated against this backdrop, this book interrogates the frictions that occur between the project of creating the model resilient city and the everyday embodiments of risk and recovery.

Through Women's Eyes

Donna Haraway's (1988) provocative and influential article, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," challenges a long-held assumption regarding the nature of "scientific knowledge" and how it is produced. Responding to the ways in which scientific knowledge is heralded as neutral, objective, and therefore superior, Haraway shows how this appeal to impartiality masks the specific position from which such knowledge emerges (male, white, heterosexual, colonial) and passes this position off as universal. As a consequence, the gaze through which the world is primarily seen (and constructed) is itself rendered unseen and un-situated – it *represents* while at the same time *escapes representation* (Haraway, 1988). Haraway refers to this as the "god trick" which enacts a "conquering gaze from nowhere" (1988, p. 581). These practices of un/seeing are in fact intrinsically embedded in relations of power, often resulting in the erasure of other ways of seeing, knowing, and living while upholding structures of privilege. Women, traditionally, have been regarded as "knowable" objects that are seen and marked yet have seldom themselves been recognized as seeing/known subjects.

Eyes are not inert instruments for seeing, but they rather take part in actively organizing our world (Rogowska-Stangret, 2018). Vision and visualizing practices have helped to structure how the world and its inhabitants are imagined, mainly from a colonial male gaze. Critically revisiting and engaging in the notion of "vision," Haraway presents the power of situated knowledges – as a view from *somewhere* – that work as a means of producing

a more adequate, richer, better account of a world, in order to live in it well and in critical, reflexive relation to our own as well as others' practices of domination and the unequal parts of privilege and oppression that make up all positions.

(1988, p. 579)

This work thus aims to present a new, different *angle of vision* with which to critically examine and (re-)imagine "resilient" recovery from disaster – through women's eyes.

It is well argued that dominant theories and conceptualizations of disasters have implicitly been grounded in men's lives (Enarson, 2012; Enarson & Phillips, 2008). Indeed, in over 40 years of disaster studies, it was not until the 1990s that gender, and specifically women's experiences, seriously began to figure in the field as a subject of interest (Bradshaw, 2014; Enarson & Meyreles, 2004). Alice Fothergill's (1996) notable work, an extensive literature review which exposes how traditional disaster research and practice tended to render women's experiences invisible – evidently resulting in the deepening of gender disparities during and after disasters – helped spark subsequent studies that examine disasters from women's perspectives (see Enarson & Morrow, 1998). In many ways, these studies have succeeded in: calling out the exclusion of

women in building knowledge about disasters and the social processes these are entangled with; challenging pervasive assumptions about women's so-called inherent vulnerabilities and abilities; and aptly identifying the limitations of current understandings of the gendered dimension of disaster response and recovery which often address gender mainly as a demographic variable. I intend to contribute to these important conversations by positioning women's experiences, practices, and perspectives not only as a category of analysis but also as a means through which disaster recovery can be theorized.

I regard women's experiences and practices as a form of situated knowledge. In this sense, I frame knowledge about disaster recovery as always socially situated and residing in the "narratives and understanding of those living, feeling, and engaging in political and social power structures" (Harcourt, 2017, p. 1008) that are embedded in processes of reconstruction. As feminist scholars have argued, women's knowledges are fertile ground for a critical inquiry into the workings of everyday life due to their specific location in webs of social power relations (Harding, 1993; hooks, 2004; Smith, 1987). This approach, according to feminist standpoint theorists, embodies *strong objectivity* (Harding, 1993)⁸ and helps provide a richer and more grounded explanation of social realities. Feminist standpoint epistemology, then, poses a counterpoint to the universal(izing), detached, and impartial "knowledge from nowhere" that constitutes much of academia's positivist moorings and inheritance.

Looking at disaster recovery from the standpoint of women, I contend, can be powerful: it helps us see the organizational and institutional processes of resilience-building that govern the everyday lives of people affected by disaster, as well as the gendered social power relations that underpin these processes, which operate at multiple scales (DeVault & McCoy, 2006; Smith, 2005). Thus, my treatment of women's experiences here is not only as a window into study participants' individual subjectivities, but also an entry point to exploring, identifying, and examining the assemblage of governing relations that shape local(ized) experiences of disaster reconstruction and recovery. Building on this, Chapter 1 introduces the concept of *epistemologies of the vulnerable*, which recognizes the everyday, embodied, and emotional relations, experiences, and knowledges of those often categorized as vulnerable (noting the ways in which the concept has been highly feminized in much of disaster discourses). Such epistemological standpoint also elucidates the ways in which women's hopes, aspirations, and care-based practices are entangled in structures that enable or constrain their actions; as well as in the ways women qualify, reappropriate, or curb attempts to make them into governable subjects of the reconstructed "resilient city."

The study presented here focuses on the experiences of women in positions of marginality – women who belonged to urban poor communities in informal settlements and were displaced following the storm surges that destroyed their homes. Due to their displacement, they and their families became "beneficiaries"⁹ of housing reconstruction and resettlement projects initiated by the state, international and local NGOs, and the private sector.

Invoking the identity of “marginalized,” “displaced women,” or “women disaster survivors,” however, requires a couple of caveats. First, I need to stress that my goal here has not been to come up with a coherent and seamless narrative of “women’s experience.” I understand that experiences and subjectivities are formed at the intersection of various social and political identities, histories, shifting circumstances, and overlapping systems of oppression and privilege (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991; Cupples, 2007). Indeed, it can be all too easy to overlook how women, who may share similar experiences of Yolanda as well as some socio-economic characteristics, can still be fragmented and heterogeneous in their standpoints, reservations, or views regarding disaster reconstruction.

Early critics of feminist standpoint epistemology have drawn attention to how the approach tends to gloss over the diversity of experiences *among* women. These criticisms echo the assertions in Mohanty’s (1988) influential article, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” where she questions the representation of women, especially of “third world women” by Western feminists (p. 52), as a homogeneous and coherent group which smooths away historically specific realities of various groups of women. The contributions of women of color to this debate on diversity have effectively demonstrated the importance of understanding women’s experiences through the notion of *intersectionality* (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006) – highlighting how hierarchical social structures, as shaped by categories such as gender, class, and race, constitute each other.

In *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) provides a nuanced perspective on feminist standpoint theory through an exploration of the intellectual contributions of Black feminist thought. Here, she elucidates how Black feminist thought has historically been a form of subjugated knowledge – suppressed not only within White male-centered institutions but also marginalized within Western feminist scholarship, which tended to privilege the experiences of White middle-class women. Specifically, Collins positions Black feminist thought as a form of critical social theory: that is, a social thought anchored on lived experiences of oppression. Not only did this epistemological stance provide an angle of vision with which to recognize the “matrix of domination” that shaped experiences of oppression (e.g., at the intersections of gender, class, race, sexuality), but also and more importantly, it provided a means for subjugated groups to create “imaginative responses to injustice” (Collins, 2000, p. 12).

Collins’s influential work has helped enrich later iterations of feminist standpoint epistemology by grounding interpretive frameworks in interlocking relationships of racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression (see Hesse-Biber, 2007). In practice, this commitment to an intersectional standpoint analysis requires moving beyond a homogeneous concept of “woman.” Moreover, by recognizing other ways of knowing and expressing knowledge – such as through music, poetry, literature, and art which have been significant mediums for the articulation of Black feminist thought – feminist standpoint epistemology opens a space for marginalized groups to become agents of knowledge and to actively reshape the realities that contribute to their marginalization.

This increasing recognition of the diversity of women's experiences in relation to structures of oppression has fueled richer theorizing and activism around the multiple forms of power relations that operate simultaneously in women's lives, including power relations rooted in modern/colonial gender systems (see Lugones, 2010). Throughout this book, when introducing study participants, I systematically offer contextual details not as mere demographic descriptors, but as evidence of their intersectional positionality. These specific, localized threads of class, age, and family responsibility shape each woman's capacity to engage with, benefit from, or resist the governance mechanisms I describe. I aim to show how women's experiences of resilience-building are always multiply determined, ensuring that the intersectional friction within the category of "displaced woman" is visible to the reader.

From the perspective of an intersectional standpoint theory, I privileged these women's everyday life and struggles in the aftermath of disaster as a source of invaluable insights for understanding the socially organized *and* socially organizing practices of dominant institutions that carry out the task of rebuilding for the "better" (Smith, 1990; 2001). Specifically, by focusing on urban poor, displaced women in the Philippines, this approach allows me to reveal how global resilience discourses intersect with local categories of class, gender, and post-colonial subjectivity to produce the "governable subject." The aim here then was not to generalize about the group of women involved in this study, but rather to analyze their narratives in order to uncover and examine social processes embedded in disaster reconstruction that generate *generalizing effects* (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 4).

As a second caveat, in congruence with the formulations of Black feminist scholar bell hooks (2004), I employ the term "marginality" as much more than a site of dispossession and deprivation that women might inhabit in processes of displacement and resettlement. On the contrary, I privilege marginality (and vulnerability) as a site of "radical possibility" and a space for resistance (hooks, 1990) to hegemonic social, cultural, and political orders that might shape conventional disaster reconstruction approaches. "Studying up" disasters through (marginalized) women's eyes, I argue, can help reveal and contest not only the community, regional, and global power structures that shape disaster experiences, but also how power relations within micro and intimate spaces constitute the social and gendered terrains of disaster (Enarson & Morrow, 1998).

PhotoKwento: Co-Constructing Narratives of Recovery

The analysis and interpretation I offer in this book are based on ethnographic data constructed between 2017 and 2018 in Tacloban City. I observed government activities, official meetings and community-based activities. I conducted 22 interviews with local officials, social workers, *barangay* [village] leaders, government agents, and representatives of non-governmental organizations. I also reviewed reconstruction plans, policies, and reports. As a primary research approach, I developed and employed a feminist photo-based method, PhotoKwento.

PhotoKwento is derived from the combination of the English word “photo” and the Filipino word “kwento” which means story. *PhotoKwento* therefore translates as “photo stories” or storytelling with photographs. Taking off from Haraway’s engagement with the notion of vision and its intimate links with power, the method was intended to re-center the gaze of women in examining recovery processes. Moreover, as a feminist method concerned with methodological issues of power, authority, and representation in the research process, *PhotoKwento* was designed to help foster engaged research relationships by providing space for study participants to take an active role in the development of research tools, to co-construct narratives of disaster recovery, and to interpret the results of the research. While sharing some similarities with other photo-based methods (such as the better-known photovoice), *PhotoKwento* focuses on re-threading and interweaving small stories of a particular experience – in this case, a disaster – which shape the bigger story of how women and their communities carve out post-disaster futures. The emphasis then is on the interconnectedness of diverse stories and the people who produce them.

The method moves beyond traditional word-based instruments through a three-phase process. First is image generation. This stage entailed working with a small group of 12 women from different resettlement communities. Provided with digital cameras, they took photographs of their everyday lives after Yolanda, capturing the mundane and the significant aspects of their post-disaster environments. The second phase was a photo-elicitation workshop (Figure 0.3). Women



Figure 0.3 A photo-elicitation workshop is conducted with women participants to develop the *PhotoKwento* tool

created individual storyboards using the photographs they took and engaged with each other's stories through an interactive gallery. In this collaborative stage, the group then curated the generated images from the different storyboards to constitute a "PhotoKwento Album." This workshop allowed participants to interpret their own visual data and identify collective issues and themes of recovery. This album then served as the primary tool for one-on-one interviews with a broader group of women in selected resettlement sites. Rather than a researcher-led questionnaire, the photographs acted as prompts for participants to narrate their spatial and political realities (see Alburo-Cañete, 2021, for a full description of the method).

Embodying feminist commitments to address power imbalances in the research process and operationalize reflexivity, photo-mediated interviewing served to facilitate collaborative engagements and knowledge co-construction. PhotoKwento does this by shifting the frame of reference of the research encounter from the perspective of the researcher (with a ready set of interview questions and conceptual frameworks) to the dynamic perspectives of various study participants evoked by the images they see in the album. Engaging with images also holds space for non-verbal expressions (e.g., sighs and pauses as participants go through the album). Viewing "interviews" as an opportunity for conversation rather than data extraction, photographs were effective prompts that enabled more in-depth explorations regarding what the images meant for women and how they related their own stories to those contained in the album (Figure 0.4). Throughout the three-phase process, women participants were



Figure 0.4 Conducting a PhotoKwento interview

invited to provide feedback and advice regarding the conduct of these activities to ensure that their perspectives continuously informed the design and implementation of the methodology.

I worked with 42 women purposively selected from three resettlement communities, namely, Ridge View Park, Cawayanville, and Pope Francis Village to participate in *PhotoKwento*. The women who participated represented a spectrum of residents who were being relocated: they included a range of ages from 18 to 73, a variety of educational levels (from no high school to college level) and civil status, different living arrangements and care responsibilities (caring for children, family members with disability, the elderly), and a diversity of occupations including women who were self-employed, government job-order workers, and those who worked at home.

The resettlement sites chosen represented three modalities of housing reconstruction approaches that were present in Tacloban which I identified as contractor-driven, donor-partnered, and community-focused, respectively.¹⁰ Contractor-driven housing comprised the largest proportion of housing projects implemented in Tacloban North. In this approach, the National Housing Authority (NHA) hires various contractors to build houses with pre-approved designs in the resettlement sites. Housing “beneficiaries” then are awarded units at random through a lottery (locally referred to as a “raffle”).

I use the term “donor-partnered” loosely to refer to the housing projects funded and implemented by international NGOs and private sector foundations in close partnership with the local government of Tacloban. Most of the donor-partnered houses are concentrated in one area, Cawayanville (formerly called Tacloban Northern Villages). Unlike the NHA-administered projects, housing design varied according to the specifications set by the donor organizations that funded the project. Another key difference from contractor-driven housing is that “beneficiaries” are often asked to render 500–700 hours of manual labor or “sweat equity” as a condition for the housing award.

Lastly, community-focused housing implemented by a consortium of faith-based and civil society organizations operated on the principle of community building. It instituted processes designed to promote community participation in developing and implementing the housing and resettlement project. Community members, for example, were involved in deciding the design of the houses and were also allowed to choose which units to occupy. As part of the conditions for the housing award, “beneficiaries” are required to regularly participate in community meetings, take part in a community-managed savings scheme, and render 700 hours of “volunteer” work in housing construction (much like sweat equity). I outline these modalities here as the differences in these approaches to housing reconstruction and resettlement will later figure in the narratives of women in the chapters that follow, especially in terms of how certain processes put in place by these projects affected their experiences of recovery. As I will further show (Chapter 4), the provision of concrete houses in resettlement sites were regarded as much more than a roof over one’s head: they became a site where aspirations for recovery were animated, disappointed, or

transformed. It is from these aspirations that possibilities for crafting non-conventional pathways for recovery emerge.

To involve participants and their broader community in the interpretation of the data, community-based exhibits were conducted in November 2019 featuring photographs from the album and narratives generated by the interviews. Community members were encouraged to view, engage with, affirm, add to, and provide alternative interpretations to the photo-stories displayed. Throughout this book, I feature photographs and narratives of women upon which I base my discussion of key themes that emerged from the study. While it is not possible to include all narratives through direct quotations, their stories formed the foundation for the analysis presented here. Certain narratives are foregrounded not because they provide “better” stories but because they either represented experiences that were largely shared by participants, or they presented something atypical.

It is important to note that I have pseudonymized the identities of all study participants, including key informants from government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Hence, no real names are used in this book and some identifying features have been modified or altered. In adherence to feminist commitments pertaining to interpretation and representation, I use study participants’ direct quotes as much as possible to tell their stories in my empirical chapters. The narratives here, however, are English translations based on interviews which were done using local languages of Tagalog, Cebuano, and Waray.

Distanced Familiarity

This is a book about feminist perspectives on disaster recovery, and it claims that knowledge is situated and that women’s embodied knowledges are a starting point for examining disaster recovery. But my knowledge as author is situated, too. Much of the interpretation and analysis I put forward in this book, and my motivation for undertaking this study in the way that I have, necessarily reflect my own positionality.

My interest in studying post-Yolanda reconstruction was profoundly shaped by my direct involvement in the disaster response efforts. I was then based in Cebu, an island province located in the central Philippines, and had witnessed first-hand the destructive power of Yolanda. Through a local non-governmental organization with which I was affiliated, I found myself deep into humanitarian work which occupied all our waking hours in the months following the disaster. Resilience-building became central to the conduct of various disaster reconstruction initiatives, with aid organizations and local NGOs employing the slogan of *Build Back Better*. My exposure in the field – whether through the projects that our organization implemented or through the studies I performed for a number of humanitarian organizations – made me reflect critically on the complexities of reconstruction, physical relocation, and the negotiations between continuity and change.

I entered this scene as a Filipino feminist scholar, activist, and development practitioner, who for more than a decade had been involved in various women's rights advocacies in the Philippines and their intersections with other social justice issues. In my early twenties, I spent four years as a community organizer in urban poor communities in Metro Cebu – an experience which gave me a degree of familiarity (and engendered feelings of solidarity) around issues involving housing and livelihood insecurity and their gendered embodiments. Moreover, being raised in the Philippines and growing up in less affluent neighborhoods in my home city of Cebu, experiences of fires, floods, and typhoons – and their after-effects – were very much part of my own lived realities. I know what it means not to have electricity and clean running water for months following a disaster, to have flood water enter your home and damage personal belongings, to lose objects of value, to feel anxiety and fear (for yourself and for those you care for) when a strong typhoon is forecast. In many ways, although I may not have always recognized it, disasters for me have not only been a research interest but have also been very much part of my personal history. I therefore engaged with the issues that I encountered in post-Yolanda disaster response activities mentioned above from this standpoint.

In relation to this research, I characterize my positionality as one of *distanced familiarity*. On one hand, my positionality allowed me certain degrees of access to my research setting and subjects – being someone who identifies as Filipino, who speaks the language, who has also lived through Yolanda, and has consequently been involved and emotionally invested in the disaster response. This provided me with an extent of *familiarity* with my subject of inquiry, and the tools and knowledge to navigate the social, cultural, and political landscape of post-Yolanda reconstruction through an appropriation of shared national (Filipino) and ethnic (Bisaya) identity, history, and experience. On the other hand, my being a researcher at that time in Australia also created for me physical and social *distance* in relation to my study participants. With access to privilege and resources, my shared identity with research participants as a Filipino woman and my relationship with them were affected by the position of power I am granted by virtue of being a middle-class educated woman. Being based in Australia (and in The Netherlands at the time of completing this manuscript) had also *displaced* me from familiar settings upon which much of my work in previous years had been grounded. Distance in terms of time, space, and social location affected the degrees of engagement I could have with my study participants. At the same time, such distance allowed me to see “the strange” in the already “familiar,” providing me with a fresh lens with which to view the subject of inquiry.

This multiplicity of identities that I held within and beyond the research encounters with study participants brought to light how my positionality and power as researcher are continuously negotiated at different sites and levels of engagement with different research stakeholders. The data constructed with women was also contingent on who I was (Filipino, woman, mother, wife, in my mid-thirties, middle-class, Australia-based researcher) as each one of these

identities shaped my entry and performance in the research setting and how people responded to me as a researcher. While I exercised power to define the breadth and scope of my research and interpret the data and narratives constructed, I also realized in the process of navigating bureaucracies and striving to gain access to displaced communities that others also held power over defining who I am, what I do, and what access was given to me – which varied from site to site. On one hand, I was met with openness from women in research areas selected for this study, but on the other hand, I found myself in a hostile environment as I was subjected to harassment in the streets of Tacloban (being at that time an “unaccompanied Filipino woman” and not at all as a researcher). I found myself constantly shifting from insider/outsider, distant/familiar positions which were at times an asset and at other times a hindrance. The recognition of my *distanced familiarity* became vital in practicing and operationalizing reflexivity in my own research especially in striving to foster co-construction of women’s narratives of disaster recovery through PhotoKwento.

The Structure of the Book

Disaster Recovery Through Women's Eyes is about how the imperative to apprehend future risks and uncertainties is (re)defining the contours of life in the post-disaster city of Tacloban, as told through the experiences of women. On one hand, it is about how risk and disaster vulnerabilities are problematized and acted upon by powerful institutions, particularly the state, in attempts to “build back better.” It reveals the emergence of new modes of governing risk that bear upon the ways in which women and their communities come into being in their post-disaster worlds. On the other hand, the book also draws attention to possibilities and the work of creation that emanate from women’s everyday navigations of precarity, insecurity, and the unknown amidst (or in spite of) attempts to make them “better.” It is about how processes of self-formation, the workings of emotions, desires and aspirations, and care relations with others and the environment provide a counterbalance to the foreclosures presented by hegemonic and technocentric views about what counts as “resilient” recovery. I foreground the productive tensions that come to light as governmental practices, discourses, and prevailing ideologies are incorporated, negotiated, and contested in and through women’s day-to-day care-based practices, affective labors, hopes, and dreams for a better future after and beyond Yolanda.

Chapter 1 lays down the theoretical foundations of the book. It details how I employ feminist theory to reframe resilience and disaster recovery from what I refer to as *epistemologies of the vulnerable*. Here, vulnerability is reclaimed from dominant formulations which associate it with characteristics that make individuals, communities, and systems as susceptible to harm arising from a range of hazards. Instead, I present vulnerability as a political standpoint with which to engage resilience thinking and practice. It offers women’s situated knowledges as constituting epistemologies of the vulnerable. The chapter argues that examining women’s everyday embodied realities can help lay bare and

confront the epistemological tensions in “resilience-building” efforts and propel alternative perspectives on what recovery from disaster means and entails. Arising from an understanding of these embodied realities, I position feminist ethics of care as a moral framework for a re-imagined construction of resilience.

The book is then divided into two Parts. Part I, “Building Back Better,” demonstrates how resilience through the discourse of Building Back Better is encoded into the institutional and social landscape of disaster recovery in the context of Tacloban. More than just rebuilding what Yolanda has damaged, Part I shows how disaster reconstruction is essentially enmeshed in a citizenship project which inculcates within communities the *responsibility* to be resilient. Accordingly, Chapter 2 focuses on state strategies, approaches, and techniques of post-disaster governance employed to facilitate the achievement of the state’s vision for “resilient” reconstruction on the scale of the city. The chapter demonstrates how the state’s performances of “care” in the aftermath of disaster constitute a novel form of authority and governing, which I identify as *benevolent discipline*. Through the concept of benevolent discipline, I argue how planned ways of “building back better” involved, to a great extent, instituting not only ways of thinking and behaving but also of *feeling* toward the social and spatial changes brought about by reconstruction initiatives in Tacloban. I emphasize how the state mobilizes affective technologies of recovery, which I argue have been an integral part of Tacloban’s post-disaster governance.

Chapter 3 focuses on how modes of governing operate at the micro-moral domains of everyday life: community, home, and the body. As these domains through which post-disaster rebuilding and governance operate are also fundamentally feminized spaces, I argue here that governing the post-disaster city of Tacloban has been largely carried out through a set of governmental practices which instrumentalize women’s participation and care-based practices in the service of the state’s visions for recovery. I call this set of practices *governing through women*. The chapter identifies processes of subjectification which harness gendered cultural constructs resulting in what I refer to as the feminization of responsibility in community recovery.

Part II, “Re-Imagining Resilience,” focuses on how women’s everyday, embodied, and emotional experiences of recovery indicate processes of becoming, despite attempts to make them “resilient” through various governmental techniques and processes of subjectification. To understand how women actively position themselves in relation to processes of recovery and reconstruction, Chapter 4 draws attention to the role of aspirations in shaping the ways in which women make sense of, as well as fashion themselves in response to, “building back better.” The chapter explores how entanglements of multiple aspirations for recovery reveal the political potential of hopes and dreams for enabling articulations and imaginations of non-conventional futures. I analyze these entanglements by examining the circulation of hopes and desires around post-disaster housing, particularly in yearnings for “a house of one’s own.” By regarding aspirations for post-disaster futures as a site of becoming, I argue that pursuits for visions of disaster recovery can be viewed as an expression of a politics of possibility.

Given the open-endedness of disaster recovery and the aspirations that help shape it, Chapter 5 advances the notion of *lived resilience*, which focuses on the plurality of means for navigating, imagining, and adapting to the indeterminacies and contingencies of life in the face of precarity and the unknown, beyond and despite hegemonic prescriptions. Drawing from the routines, rhythms, and flows of daily experiences of women as they navigate the intricacies of disaster recovery, I outline dimensions of lived resilience, centering the role of care and care relations. The notion of lived resilience draws attention to how understanding recovery from the standpoint of the “vulnerable” challenges rationalist, technocentric, and modernist frameworks and contributes to presenting alternative knowledges and resilience practices.

In the Conclusion, I situate my writing of this book in our shared experiences of going through the COVID-19 pandemic and the multiple crises we continue to confront. Drawing from women's experiences of recovery after Yolanda, I reflect on the relevance of these insights for rethinking the ways we address different forms of crisis and advance the idea of care as regenerative practice – as an urgent, alternative (and hopeful) way of living in an increasingly precarious world.

Notes

- 1 The real names of study participants are not used in this book and some contextual details have been modified to protect their identity.
- 2 A storm surge is an abnormal and often dangerous rise in sea level caused by a storm, such as a hurricane or typhoon. It is essentially water that is pushed inland by the force of the storm's strong winds.
- 3 Typhoons are assigned international names by the World Meteorological Organization primarily to aid aviation and navigation. Names are drawn from a list that includes names of plants, animals, people, places, and so on. When a typhoon enters the Philippine Area of Responsibility (PAR), a local name is assigned. Hence, in the Philippines, typhoon Haiyan is more widely known as Yolanda (Bankoff & Borri-naga, 2016).
- 4 Tropical cyclones that originate from different parts of the world are named differently. Those that originate in the Atlantic and Caribbean are called hurricanes, while those that develop in the Indian Ocean are called cyclones. In the Pacific, such weather systems are called typhoons.
- 5 The minimum annual income requirement is based on 1991 constant prices. Foreign exchange rate used is US\$1 = Php 48.2.
- 6 These wind speeds range from Category 2 to Category 4 on the Saffir-Simpson wind scale which is often employed to measure intensity of tropical cyclones.
- 7 Abidin Kusno (2010, p. 90) employs the term “exemplary centre” to refer to the “spectacle of order and development” in his examination of city-making practices in Jakarta, Indonesia. The visibility of post-Yolanda Tacloban in discussions on climate change, “building back better,” and resilience, elevated the status of the city as an “exemplary centre” where resilience-building became a spectacle of (climate-smart) modernity.
- 8 In Sandra Harding's (1993) influential work, “Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What Is ‘Strong Objectivity’?”, she critiques scientific objectivity anchored on the principles of supposedly “value-neutral” research. She argues that this is a “weak” form of objectivity as researcher bias can never be fully removed. She posits that

beginning social inquiry from the standpoint of women actually strengthens standards of objectivity. Moreover, by acknowledging one's positionality and biases, Harding contends, researchers can attain "stronger objectivity."

- 9 I am critical of the term "beneficiary" as this tends to reinforce notions of survivors as passive "victims" awaiting aid. It also tends to represent aid as always to the benefit of its recipients. However, this is the term employed by government and other aid organizations and thus I use it here to reflect the common usage.
- 10 This typology is not exhaustive as there were other modalities that were not included in my study. For example, I did not include on-site reconstruction as well as housing projects that were implemented through community mortgage programs which were not included in the government's resettlement project.

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Part I

Building Back Better

[W]e are no longer allowed to live near the sea. [The government] said it's for our safety, for our own good. Looking at this storm surge warning, I feel afraid that another Yolanda will happen again. But it's still painful to think about leaving [that place]. We grew up there. We formed our families, raised our children, built our lives there. It's painful knowing that we can't ever go back. But we were only squatters, you see, living on borrowed land.

(Vangie, 54, married, mother of four)



Figure A Storm surge warning put up across coastal “danger zones” in Tacloban

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1 Epistemologies of the Vulnerable

“Stop Calling Me Resilient!”

Tracie Washington, President of the Louisiana Justice Institute, had been celebrated for her powerful statement expressed in protest to the ways in which media and policymakers in New Orleans praised communities for their “resilience”:

Stop calling me resilient, because every time you say, ‘Oh, they’re resilient’, it actually means you can do something else, something new to my community ... We were not born to be resilient; we are conditioned to be resilient. I don’t want to be resilient ... I want to fix the things that create the need for us to be resilient in the first place.

(cited in Davoudi, 2018, pp. 5–6)

Washington’s pronouncement was sparked by the displacement and dispossession of low-income racial and ethnic minorities after Hurricane Katrina. As New Orleans was “built back better” and became hailed as a model resilient city, communities were facing the encroachment of profit-oriented gentrification projects that eased them out of socially and culturally significant spaces (Barrios, 2016; Kang, 2018).

Critics of resilience issue a damning verdict on how resilience programs, especially in the context of recovery, such as that of post-Katrina New Orleans, have been deployed as a tool to produce “adaptable” social subjects in the face of dispossession (Bracke, 2016b; Davoudi, 2012; Neocleous, 2013; Nightingale, 2015). In Naomi Klein’s (2007) widely acclaimed work *The Shock Doctrine*, she reveals the disturbing proliferation of disaster capitalism, a phenomenon wherein the shocks and disruptions caused by disasters are exploited to serve capitalist and neoliberal interests that are subsequently inscribed into processes of rebuilding (see also Schuller, 2008; Uson, 2017). The statement “stop calling me resilient!” is, therefore, a political repudiation of how resilience has been employed in the service of neoliberal capitalism.

Politically, my work aligns in many ways with the critical positions made toward resilience programs in disaster recovery and reconstruction. More

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importantly, it echoes the need to foreground issues of justice, equity, and transformative change. Nonetheless, rather than express a blanket rejection of resilience, I maintain that the concept still holds value for understanding and pursuing complex social and environmental change (Harris et al., 2017). In order to appreciate such value, however, resilience needs to be re-imagined as a process that is not necessarily confined to the logics and ethics of neoliberalism; but rather as grounded in situated practices and negotiations, amidst experiences of crisis that take place in everyday life (Cote & Nightingale, 2012).

To engage with the notion of resilience as proposed, I turn to a concept that is often taken as a corollary to it: *vulnerability*. Emerging in the 1970s as a lens with which to explain how disasters happen and whom they affect, vulnerability has been a useful concept for examining social, environmental, and historical processes that place specific groups of people at risk of disasters (Bankoff & Hilhorst, 2022; 2004; von Meding & Chmutina, 2023). In disaster management parlance, vulnerability is often constructed as susceptibility to the impacts of hazards, with an underlying assumption that the vulnerable have limited capacity to cope with potential threats. A widely cited definition is drawn from the work of Blaikie et al. (2004, p. 11): “By vulnerability we mean the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard (an extreme natural event or process).” From this definition, resilience and vulnerability clearly share a common language, albeit framed in contrasting ways. They are often construed as semantic opposites in the spectrum of disaster risk reduction: to enhance resilience, one must reduce and eventually overcome vulnerability (and vice versa).

In their conceptualization of disaster risks and vulnerabilities, Blaikie et al. (2004) elaborate on the broader socio-political and economic processes that influence the impact of natural hazards on people (see also Oliver-Smith, 2004). Other scholars have likewise emphasized the need to view vulnerabilities as mapped onto pre-existing social orders such that so-called “natural” disasters largely result from the decisions societies make (and the ways in which they are organized) and not just the natural forces that are associated with such events (Kelman, 2022). Despite these critical perspectives that have been in circulation in the field for many years, disaster management practices still tend to view vulnerability with a narrow focus on the characteristics or the properties of people that make them susceptible to disasters. Vulnerability then has come to be associated with poverty, people’s lack of education, lack of capacity, and limited resources, often without much critical reflection on the role of power, the political economy, and social inequalities in the creation of risk (Bankoff & Hilhorst, 2022). Consequently, people who are seen to embody these associated characteristics often become the objects of planning, vulnerability reduction, and more recently resilience-building (Delica-Willison & Willison, 2004). The vulnerable, then, are those who are seen, counted, and “fixed,” but whose views and aspirations are rarely considered in expert-designed disaster management plans and programs.

Yet, the vulnerable, more than anyone else, are those who live, feel, and intimately experience the processes and consequences of attempts to make them resilient. In this sense, there is also much that can be learned (and created) from the position of being vulnerable. Thus, diverging from common understandings of vulnerability as weakness (von Meding & Chmutina, 2023), I regard vulnerability here as a form of situated knowledge and a political standpoint that provide a powerful resource for understanding, unmasking, and potentially reshaping resilience thinking and practice (see Butler, 2016). I refer to these forms of everyday/embodied/emotional relations, experiences, and knowledges as *epistemologies of the vulnerable*. Epistemology, as I use it here, pertains to how knowledge is produced, validated, and understood. By epistemologies of the vulnerable, I mean to highlight the specific ways of knowing and understanding the world that emerge from the lived realities, experiences, and social positions of those traditionally labeled as vulnerable. This chapter therefore engages the concept of resilience from the standpoint of vulnerability.

These specific ways of knowing are particularly evident in the experiences of various “vulnerabilized” groups (Chmutina et al., 2023). For instance, children, whose agency in disaster contexts often goes unrecognized, possess rich understandings of their surroundings. These understandings have proven to be crucial for informing and actively contributing to disaster preparedness, response, and risk communication (Alburo-Cañete, 2019; Epstein et al., 2006; Mitchell et al., 2008; Tanner et al., 2009). Similarly, persons with disabilities navigate built environments and social systems in ways that expose failures in disaster planning that are invisible to able-bodied individuals, revealing critical knowledge about accessibility, social support networks, and alternative coping mechanisms (Alburo-Cañete et al., 2023; Villeneuve et al., 2017; Zayas et al., 2017). Indigenous communities, with their deep connections to land and water, and with their traditional ecological knowledge, offer profound perspectives on living with environmental change, often challenging dominant technocratic resilience paradigms that disregard their historical understandings and sustainable practices (Hilhorst et al., 2015; Macalandag, 2024).

While the concept of epistemologies of the vulnerable encompasses the diverse knowledges of these groups, among others, I specifically focus on the situated knowledges of women. Without assuming homogeneity and with due recognition of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006), this emphasis on women is deliberate, given the prevailing discourse in disaster practices that frequently essentializes and feminizes vulnerability. Such discourse often defaults to generalized classifications such as “vulnerable-groups-like-women,” where women are almost always perfunctorily assigned the “vulnerable” label, regardless of their diverse capacities, social locations, and shifting circumstances (Cupples, 2007; Seager, 2014). The discourse surrounding women’s vulnerabilities is, of course, not unfounded as, in many contexts, women do experience varying forms of inequalities as well as institutional and cultural barriers to realizing their rights, thus adversely affecting their lives before, during, and after disasters. In other words, *broadier processes of marginalization and specific life circumstances*

do produce gendered forms of vulnerabilities to disaster and very often do place specific groups of women at a disadvantage. While likely well-intentioned, the danger of such essentialist assumptions is that they foster paternalistic institutional responses, ignore the ways in which women's experiences are embedded in systems of gendered social inequalities, and foreclose alternative views regarding possibilities for women's agency. They also tend to elide how women, in their diversity, actually experience and navigate the complexities of rebuilding after disasters and shape their subjectivities accordingly. Acknowledging that these are important conversations to have in the field, I depart from this debate (for now) and instead focus attention on another question: what forms of knowledges are produced by women designated – and intervened upon – as vulnerable? More importantly, I am interested in how such knowledges can foreground different visions and practices of recovery and post-disaster development. Without romanticizing the position of the vulnerable, I seek to enable an understanding of resilience as drawn from the embodied realities of women who are affected by disaster – and thus form the basis of reconceptualizing resilience as *lived*.

My conceptualization of epistemologies of the vulnerable advances a feminist methodological and analytical approach to understanding resilience and disaster recovery. It is specifically inspired by feminist standpoint epistemology (as elaborated in the Introduction) and feminist political ecology. Feminist political ecology, in particular, has offered critical perspectives in dealing with today's most pressing environmental concerns, including climate change, environmental degradation, struggles for sustainable livelihoods, and, more recently, disasters (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015; Resurrección, 2019; Rocheleau, 2015). It draws attention to the gendered processes that take place within the politics of environmental degradation and resource management, the commodification of nature, and the "ongoing rounds of accumulation, enclosure and dispossession" that are associated with these trends (Elmhirst, 2015, p. 519). While its applications and framings have been diverse (Rocheleau, 2015), feminist political ecology staunchly critiques neoliberal and patriarchal power structures that mark environmental (and disaster) governance in contemporary development practices and designs. In conceptualizing epistemologies of the vulnerable, I combine feminist standpoint epistemology and feminist political ecology to advance the following arguments: (1) processes that shape disasters, displacement, and dispossession can be critically examined from women's diverse lived experiences; (2) such understanding is necessary to counter the persistent silences around political, economic, and ecological issues that form the basis for inequalities, disempowerment, and disadvantage aggravated by the experience of disasters; and (3) situating an analysis of recovery in gendered, emotional, and lived experiences, as well as care relations in which such experiences are embedded, can offer alternative ways for imagining post-disaster futures (see Resurrección, 2019).

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part engages with the notion of resilience. I discuss its dominant iterations, how it shapes current policies, frameworks, and practices of disaster recovery and then highlight the main critiques raised against it. The second part demonstrates how epistemologies of

the vulnerable can help us go beyond the binary created by discourses for and against resilience – either as a panacea for a world at risk or as a mechanism for sustaining inequality – and puts forward an alternative perspective that centers on the notion of resilience as potentiality, grounded in everyday realities of living with risk and vulnerability. In this sense, resilience and vulnerability are not seen as oppositional categories but rather as constitutive elements of embodied life.

In Pursuit of Resilience

Resilience has been understood differently according to its applications in a variety of fields: psychology, engineering, physics, economics, and the natural sciences, to name a few (Cretney, 2014; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016; Grove, 2018). Of great influence in the field of disaster risk management is the view of resilience as originating from ecological systems theory, specifically attributed to the work of Crawford S. Holling. In his landmark article, “Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems,” Holling (1973) advances an idea of resilience not as the amount of time required for a system to return to a state of equilibrium (which he refers to as “stability”), but rather “a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables” (p. 14). Holling’s ideas of *system persistence* and *absorptive capacity* have since been developed and applied as a framework to understand adaptation and change in natural systems. Over the years, this “ecological view” of resilience has been applied to analyzing social systems, or what we might call a socio-ecological systems approach (Cote & Nightingale, 2012). Indeed, the idea that disasters are produced through the interplay of social and environmental factors has been influential in current formulations of disaster resilience.

The United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) defines resilience as:

[t]he ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management.

(UNDRR, 2017)

But there are also variations to definitions of resilience apart from this. For example, the Rockefeller Foundation, which funds the 100 Resilient Cities Program, echoes the conceptualization of resilience as the ability to survive, adapt, and transform in the face of shocks and stresses, but also adds: “Building resilience is about making people, communities, and systems better prepared to withstand catastrophic events – both natural and manmade (*sic*) – and able to bounce back more quickly and emerge stronger from these shocks and stresses” (Rockefeller Foundation, 2015).

More recent formulations emphasize the notion of bouncing *forward* rather than simply bouncing *back*. These re-conceptualizations indicate a contradiction: bouncing *back* assumes that there is a stable state of equilibrium to return to, while bouncing *forward* signifies a shift to a new or different state (Cretney, 2014; Feinstein, 2015). In the context of climate change, which introduces elements of uncertainty regarding what forms of future risks societies might have to confront, the idea of simply going back to normal has been challenged in favor of producing higher forms of resilience, however these higher forms might be defined (Tierney, 2015). Adding to the myriad ways resilience has been understood, resilience is also applied to different scales – systems, communities, households, individuals – all requiring nuanced approaches. Hence, from ecological systems to social systems, from national policy to individual coping mechanisms, from an idea of a return to a previous stable form to transformation to another state – all these encompass the term “resilience” as it is applied in the field of disaster.

Regardless of ambiguities in defining resilience, it remains a positively accepted concept in policy, development, disaster management, and humanitarian circles. Rather than representing something concrete, resilience is sometimes thought of as an aspirational paradigm (Sanderson, 2016) that allows for collaboration between various actors toward some (assumed) shared goal. This aspirational nature of resilience is most prominently articulated in disaster recovery projects.

Build Back Better

Resilience has been a particularly important idea for disaster reconstruction and recovery in recent years. While disasters are often perceived as *destructive forces*, they are also very *productive forces*. In this sense, disasters also bring about the creation of new physical and social landscapes “as people traverse the difficult path between restoration and change” (Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 2002, p. 12). Hence, it is not uncommon to hear of disasters being referred to as “windows of opportunity” to introduce changes which would make institutions and communities more resilient.

In this era of resilience-building, such windows of opportunity are most notably expressed through Build Back Better – a popular catchphrase employed by international agencies, humanitarian actors, governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) involved in the processes of rebuilding. Build Back Better was popularized by former US President Bill Clinton in his capacity as UN Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery (Clinton, 2006; Fan, 2013; Manakkara et al., 2014). The catastrophic Indian Ocean Tsunami in 2004 had prompted a discussion on the role of disaster reconstruction in ensuring that risks to future disasters are diminished. Traditionally, reconstruction had simply consisted of repairing physical damages brought about by calamity, emphasizing the quick restoration of infrastructure. However, such an approach was increasingly seen to be insufficient, as merely restoring pre-disaster standards did not necessarily reduce future risks (Kennedy et al., 2008). Hence, a key emphasis of the disaster relief and reconstruction efforts undertaken

following the tsunami was to regard the disaster as an opportunity to rebuild communities toward being stronger, improved, and less vulnerable than before – in other words, to build or increase resilience.

Clinton's (2006, p. 1) Key Propositions to Build Back Better laid the groundwork for this approach, emphasizing critical aspects such as community-driven recovery, promoting fairness and equity, empowering local governments, and fostering effective coordination based on good information. These propositions also highlighted the crucial roles of multilateral agencies, NGOs, and the private sector in enabling economic recovery and ensuring accountable partnerships, all with the ultimate goal of leaving communities safer by reducing risks and building resilience.

Aid organizations and humanitarian agencies have since promoted and built on this approach in subsequent disaster reconstruction projects, including those that were initiated after the Kashmir Earthquake in Pakistan and Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar in 2008, the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 (Fan, 2013), and Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines in 2013. In 2015, Build Back Better eventually was adopted as a principle for disaster recovery and reconstruction in the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (United Nations, 2015a).

Both Clinton's propositions and the Sendai Framework underscore several central elements of building back better. They emphasize the role of government institutions in integrating disaster risk reduction into planning and management, particularly for long-term recovery. Effective and efficient recovery efforts are seen as vital, requiring strong coordination among government and key stakeholders at the local, national, and international levels. Both documents also highlight the significant role of the private sector in relief, rehabilitation, and reconstruction; including the recovery of vital infrastructure, businesses, and livelihoods. Crucially, recovery efforts necessitate institutionalizing measures that enable communities to prepare for and reduce future disaster risks, with a strong emphasis on community participation, especially from vulnerable groups.

The perspective advanced by Build Back Better, which focuses on the "improvement" of societal functions, structures, and systems to better cope with future hazards (UNWCDRR, 2015), is a welcome advance in the face of uncertainties resulting from environmental change in contemporary times. Such a conceptualization of building back better puts forward the argument that in order to support recovery for the better, a focus on a longer-term coordinated approach to reconstruction is needed. Moreover, this long-term perspective links recovery and reconstruction to a broader development agenda which is anchored in the principles of sustainability and resilience (Fan, 2013; Mosel & Levine, 2014; Reid et al., 2013; United Nations, 2015b; UNWCDRR, 2015).

At the level of aspiration, Build Back Better is clearly an agreeable heuristic which may be useful in stimulating discussion about perspectives of change and how these can be achieved (Fan, 2013). Yet, Build Back Better (and building resilience, more broadly) are also normative in the sense that they prescribe certain forms of improvements over others. This normative aspect of resilience-building

carries assumptions regarding who are at-risk subjects, which kinds of solutions are privileged in reducing vulnerabilities, and which qualities resilient subjects are expected to possess (Tierney, 2015). A reflection of the prescriptive character of Build Back Better therefore leads to questions of what “better” looks like, “better” for whom, and how it is to be enacted – making the notion of “better” a political claim. A critical analysis of resilience in disaster recovery and reconstruction, therefore, requires confronting issues of power in the knowledge and practices of rebuilding better.

Interrogating “Resilient” Recovery

A number of studies that examine Build Back Better initiatives have revealed underlying epistemological tensions embedded in reconstruction encounters (Kennedy et al., 2008; Maly, 2017; Schilderman & Lyons, 2011). Indeed, it has been observed that across different settings, rebuilding for the “better” has the tendency to “articulate the visions and desires of [local and international] experts and political and socioeconomic elites while marginalizing the voices of those people who actually experience the brunt of a catastrophe’s effects” (Barrios, 2017, p. 234; see also Boano, 2009; Peacock et al., 2007; Stodart, 2016). That such visions and desires tend to have strong neoliberal and modernist underpinnings (Barrios, 2016; 2017) speaks of the ways in which (hegemonic) development ideologies are tightly imbricated in aspirations for “resilient” recovery.¹ The existence of such epistemological tensions points to the need to interrogate further how power shapes the visions, aspirations, and actions that are incarnated in the processes of rebuilding.

I start with the claim that resilience in the context of rebuilding better cannot be appreciated as a “knowledge from nowhere” (Haraway, 1988). Rather, it is nested in power relations and social-ecological dynamics that animate the conceptualization of reconstruction policy or practice, and that orient modes of post-disaster governance. Along this line of thinking, this section engages with two mutually reinforcing streams of critique that have been raised against the notion of resilience: (1) the depoliticization of resilience; and (2) the deployment of resilience as a neoliberal tool for governance. While acknowledging the significance and usefulness of such critiques, I argue for the need to continuously engage with, rather than abandon, the concept of resilience and advance an understanding of resilience as *potentiality*.

Power and Politics in Resilience

While the socio-ecological systems framework – with its origins in the natural sciences – provides an important perspective for foregrounding human-environmental dynamics implicated in disasters, it often repeats the tendencies of earlier approaches in hazards research to elide the importance of socio-political factors in producing vulnerabilities to disasters (Hewitt, 1983; Jones & Murphy, 2009; Watts, 1983). Cote and Nightingale (2012, p. 479) highlight the weaknesses of such views of resilience:

the reliance on ecological principles to analyse social dynamics has led to a kind of social analysis that hides the possibility to ask important questions about the role of power and culture in adaptive capacity, or to unpack normative questions such as ‘resilience of what?’ and ‘for whom?’ when applied to the social realm.

In their examination of experiences of flooding in southern Malawi, Harrison and Chiroro (2016) reiterate the point above by critiquing how disasters have been naturalized by resilience discourses – that is, they occur as a “sad account” of the effects of natural forces. There is, in fact, an increasing consensus within the field of disaster studies that disasters are not reducible to natural events (for example, a typhoon), but are rather the outcome of the complex interactions between natural systems, social systems, history, and the built environment (Blaikie et al., 2004; Gaillard et al., 2007; Kelman, 2022; Oliver-Smith & Hoffman, 1999). Despite this recognition of disasters as embedded in complex relationships, we continue to see slippages in the usage of the term “natural disaster” that overemphasize the role of natural hazards (Chmutina & von Meding, 2019).

This naturalization of disasters, according to Harrison and Chiroro (2016), occludes issues of power as well as access to resources and institutional spaces which significantly shape vulnerabilities and how people bounce back from disasters. Issues of power and politics therefore constitute a blind spot in socio-ecological systems thinking that inform conventional resilience practices. However, beyond simply being a blind spot, the depoliticization of resilience has significant implications for equity and justice, as it propagates the assumption that all individuals and communities are affected by, and cope with, disasters equally (Davoudi, 2012; 2018; Shrestha et al., 2019).

MacKinnon and Derickson (2012) argue that the concept of resilience is inherently conservative, as it tends to serve and reinforce dominant ideologies by masking the role of power and the differential ways by which vulnerabilities are produced. Because this form of resilience thinking tends to normalize the status quo by ignoring the political aspects of socio-environmental disruption and change, it is unable to address social inequalities. Thus, resilience discourses in recovery may speak of building more robust systems and infrastructure, creating “climate-smart” economies, increasing community preparedness, and so on; but, as critics have pointed out, they are often silent about changing structural factors that make people and communities vulnerable to disasters. As Béné et al. (2014, p. 598) assert, “resilience is not a pro-poor concept, in the sense that it does not exclusively apply to, or benefit, the poor.” In the context of the “stop calling me resilient!” campaign in New Orleans, for instance, resilience has come to mean the ability of the poor and the marginalized to “absorb the shocks” of gentrification projects and other forms of capitalist ventures undertaken in the name of building back better. In the Philippine context, these resilience narratives pervade official government pronouncements and media representations about the Filipino people’s persistence in confronting disasters – wading through floods with a smile – but at the same time such narratives fail to articulate how broader

political structures and socio-economic inequality have compelled communities and households to bear the disproportionate impact of calamities (Recio et al., 2023; Sison, 2014).

In practice, resilience tends to be defined and enacted by state agencies and those that profess expert knowledge (Barrios, 2014; 2016). As a result, marginalized groups, who are considered the most vulnerable to disasters, often have minimal roles in deciding how their resilience is to be built. Although “participation” remains a catchphrase in both disaster risk management and development practice, the ways in which the delivery of many recovery programs are detached from the lifeworlds of so-called “beneficiary” communities speak of the quality of “participation” engendered in these contexts (see, for example, Barrios, 2016; Boano, 2009; Grundy-Warr & Rigg, 2016). Who participates and who is heard in such spaces of participation, and which logics of resilience-building ultimately prevail are necessary questions that are invariably sidelined when resilience is depoliticized. Related to this criticism is an observation of how resilience has come to be tightly aligned with neoliberal paradigms which are adopted by powerful public and private sector actors, as well as international aid and financing institutions which shape resilience programs in various contexts. As such, resilience may also be regarded as a “pervasive idiom” of governance in contemporary times (Walker & Cooper, 2011).

Resilience as a Tool for Neoliberal Governance

According to Tierney (2015), resilience as a particular form of knowledge carries with it its own “ideological baggage.” Many scholars have pointed out how resilience has “ontological commitments that make it ideally suited to neoliberal forms of governance” (Joseph, 2013, p. 38). Some argue that the resilience discourse echoes a particular logic that devolves state responsibilities for mitigating and addressing risks to the level of the household and individual (Wichterich, 2015). Dominant formulations of resilience presuppose a social system that is persistently at risk of disruption from external stimuli (for example, hazards and climate change). As disruptive change is inevitable, and with root causes that supposedly lie external to the social system, the only way to respond to such change, according to these logics, is to adapt (Tierney, 2015).

The emergence of resilience, and its entrenchment in contemporary disaster management discourses, are, according to Bracke (2016b, p. 851), “part and parcel of neoliberal ‘worlding’.” This worlding operates not only in terms of integration into the political economy but also in terms of “reshaping the structure of social relationships and subjectivities” toward becoming amenable subjects of a neoliberal social order (Bracke, 2016b). Thus, many critics have argued that resilience has largely functioned as a mode of *neoliberal governmentality*.

Governmentality, as coined by Michel Foucault (1991), can be succinctly summarized as the *conduct of conduct* where “government” refers to the processes by which human conduct is shaped by calculated means (Li, 2007, p. 275). According to Foucault (1980), the power to govern does not lie in the use of force but rather in

the ways in which certain “truths” are legitimated, institutionalized, and normalized. These “truths” (or power/knowledge regimes) therefore set the parameters for thinking and action. Governing takes on two forms (following Petchesky, 2016): (1) *disciplinary techniques* primarily targeting individual bodies in order to render them as “docile” subjects, and (2) *regulatory processes* aimed at managing populations (for example, movement of people, sanitation, hygiene, housing, and so on). These governmental processes are especially prominent in disaster contexts. Disasters often provide opportunities for the state and other reconstruction actors to bring populations under tighter control: through rigorous enumeration, calculation, and classification of various aspects of life and reshaping them according to specific designs of recovery and reconstruction (de Waal, 2008).

The link between neoliberal governmentality and resilience is most clearly articulated through the notion of *responsibilization*. Trnka and Trundle (2017, p. 2) regard responsibilization as “the increasing divestiture from the state onto individuals who are under growing pressure to formulate themselves as independent, self-managing, and self-empowered subjects.” A critique posed by Julian Reid (2013), for example, calls out how resilience thinking challenges people at the individual level to achieve the ideal of resilience in the face of uncertainty and risk. Resilience is achieved by becoming “adaptive” and attaining betterment through employing a range of entrepreneurial skills. Thus, rather than changing social conditions that produce difficulties, suffering, and risks and holding the state accountable for mitigating these stresses, the resilient individual is expected to be elastic and adaptable so that they can absorb shocks, disruptions, and suffering *better* (Chandler, 2013). This posturing of individual adaptability and pliability meshes well with neoliberal approaches that foreground responsibilities of individuals (and communities) to govern themselves in appropriate ways (Bulley, 2013; Joseph, 2013).

Becoming “responsible” and being able to manage oneself in the face of adversity are not often viewed negatively in popular discourse and may in fact appear ostensibly pragmatic. But, as some authors have noted, resilience policies and programs often enact a form of *responsibility without power* (see MacKinnon & Derickson, 2012; Peck & Tickell, 2002, p. 387) – whereby individuals and communities are expected to take responsibility for themselves while having minimal roles in shaping the decisions that affect their lives. As I will later discuss in Chapter 3, women have often taken on such responsibilities of disaster recovery yet still find themselves marginalized in configurations of power within their own communities and homes.

The critical work on resilience as constituting a governance regime is valuable as it reveals how resilience operates at the micropolitical level. According to Bracke (2016a, 53), resilience exercises power on subjects and helps shape the ways in which “subjects come into being and are maintained.” Such power is not simply shown in how resilience programs are imposed on individuals and communities, but also in the ways that aspirations are shaped, in the ways that feelings toward becoming “responsible” are nurtured, and in all the other complex manners that power is exercised at different scales. One could argue,

then, that resilience carries with it an ethical imperative of creating good and responsible subjects who act in “resilient” ways.

The theoretical critiques discussed earlier find compelling empirical grounding in diverse disaster recovery contexts, exposing how depoliticized and neoliberal resilience logics persistently manifest. Post-Katrina New Orleans, as previously mentioned, reveals how the aspirational Build Back Better framework inadvertently spurred profit-driven gentrification and the displacement of low-income racial and ethnic minorities, transforming resilience into a mechanism for creating “adaptable” subjects amidst entrenched structural inequalities. Likewise, analyses of the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami recovery, such as in Indonesia and Thailand, often demonstrate how externally driven, large-scale reconstruction efforts, even when aiming for improvement, frequently disregarded local social structures and Indigenous coping strategies, at times worsening pre-existing disparities or imposing ill-fitting solutions (Daly et al., 2016; Grundy-Warr & Rigg, 2016). In Haiti’s earthquake recovery, critics observed the powerful role of international aid and private entities, whose market-centric approaches and focus on individual self-reliance routinely bypassed local governance and community-led initiatives, thereby fostering a dynamic of “responsibility without power” among the affected (Schuller, 2019; Verlin & Rundell, 2018). Similarly, despite nominal encouragement for community engagement, the resilience-building interventions following Typhoon Yolanda in the Philippines often mirrored a top-down, expert-centric rationale (see Chapter 2).

Productive Tensions: Resilience as Potentiality

Critics of resilience have provided compelling arguments as to how conventional resilience thinking and practice are largely underwritten by neoliberal, capitalist, and even colonial logics and ethics. I agree with them on many points. I agree that resilience tends to be deployed as a conservative concept despite its promises of transformation. By depoliticizing resilience, issues of justice and equity – which are especially urgent in disaster contexts – tend to get ignored, as resilience-building often privileges techno-managerial approaches associated with western cultural norms (see Alburo-Cañete, 2014; Hewitt, 1983). Hence, the voices of the marginalized groups who do not have access to resources and spaces of power likely get drowned out by the “expert” knowledge that dominates decision-making processes regarding how to build back better.

I also agree with the claims made that dominant resilience practices have become part of a cultural/citizenship project that acts on reshaping social relations, moral orientations, and subjectivities to suit modernist and neoliberal ideals (Bracke, 2016b; Neocleous, 2013). Notions of neoliberal governmentality and biopower are particularly useful in unmasking how power operates in the processes of subjectification, especially in contexts of disaster. This Foucauldian approach to resilience also reveals how “moral codes” of neoliberalism cultivate an ethical self that is responsibly able to withstand crisis in a shock-shaped world (Bracke, 2016b). Indeed, I have taken inspiration from these works and

applied the concept of governmentality in my analysis of reconstruction in some empirical chapters of this book.

But perhaps there are also positive elements in resilience practices that create potentialities for a more transformative politics (Rose & Lentzos, 2017). While various criticisms situate – or rather, cement – resilience as employed in the service of capitalist and neoliberal projects, it does not necessarily hold any allegiance to such projects. There are indeed instances – which often remain invisible in dominant narratives – when resilience is re-appropriated by grassroots movements and communities to articulate alternative discourses of self, community, and society beyond (or counter to) the neoliberal/capitalist ethos. This re-appropriation was, for example, demonstrated in the study by Cretney and Bond (2014) on Project Lyttleton, an activist grassroots initiative developed to respond to the 2011 Christchurch earthquake in Aotearoa New Zealand. The creation of timebank,² an alternative currency for exchange of labor and services which circulated norms of non-monetary reciprocal relationships, enabled faster recovery than in other affected communities by nurturing supportive bonds and care relations. Among other initiatives was a community-owned and managed food cooperative which was developed in response to the closure of a local grocery store on which the community depended. Project Lyttleton later spurred community programs that aimed to re-localize food production and mobilized grassroots initiatives to address other social and environmental issues. These undertakings, though small-scale, employ the notion of resilience. Yet, in doing so, these have provided spaces where capitalist and neoliberal logics and ethics were being challenged. According to Gibson-Graham (1996; 2006), small-scale shifts can also be transformative and are thus worth examining and, more importantly, worth making visible (see also Cameron & Hicks, 2014).

In their article, “The ‘South’ Speaks Back: Exposing the Ethical Stakes of Dismissing Resilience in Conflict-Affected Contexts,” Hajir et al. (2022) powerfully argue that western academics branding resilience as inherently colonial risk inadvertently perpetuating another form of western imposition, effectively silencing the distinct experiences and understandings of resilience held by communities in the Global South who consider their actions as forms of resilience. Drawing from their reflections on work with Syrian youths, they foreground the oft-silenced perspectives of crisis-affected populations and acknowledge that political awareness and resistance can be embedded within local forms of resilience. They call for a more nuanced engagement that moves beyond problematic binaries and embraces the multiplicity, contingency, and ethical dimensions of how affected populations define and enact their own pathways to coping and transformation. According to Kastner (2020, p. 383), while association with resilience with western epistemologies and neoliberal governance seems “inescapable,” “this might not have to be the case: resilience can potentially be redesigned, based on different political and ethical commitments.”

As established early in this chapter, resilience has always been a malleable concept. The way that most critiques tend to highlight (only) the conservative nature and neoliberal underpinnings of resilience runs the risk of foreclosing

alternative ways of conceiving resilience – ways that might embrace a more social justice-oriented anti-colonial imperative and express counter-discourses to constructions of the neoliberal resilient self. Scholars such as Cretney and Bond (2014) and Grove (2018) warn that a general condemnation of resilience might: (1) deter us from understanding how resilience approaches actually operate in different contexts; and (2) lead us to inadvertently uphold the hegemony of western neoliberal discourses by shutting down possibilities of more transformative applications of resilience that are meaningful to those societies affected by disasters. While critics may advise against using resilience concepts and frameworks (e.g., MacKinnon & Derickson, 2012), the fact remains that organizations, institutions, governments, and even local communities continuously apply and appropriate resilience in addressing socio-environmental change (Harris et al., 2017). According to Grove (2018, p. 274), resilience is thus a problem in a Deleuzian sense: “a provocation to thought that demands sustained and intensive *engagement*” (emphasis in original).

Doing away with a blanket critique of resilience-as-neoliberalism, however, requires much analytic work. I suggest that we draw from the productive tensions between the critiques raised against resilience and the actual engagements with resilience that take place in different contexts to explore possibilities for alternatives. Central to resilience thinking, according to Nelson (2014), is an *ontology of potentiality* – a potentiality for adaptation, a potentiality for transformation, a potentiality that is not exhausted by the hegemonic regimes that purportedly define it (Grove, 2018). I position my approach along this notion of resilience as potentiality and as a process of becoming played out in everyday navigations of crisis, risk, and vulnerability. Placing analytical focus on the everyday embodiments and politics of risk, however, requires exploring other epistemologies with which to develop alternative views of resilience. This book leans toward women's situated knowledges as a starting point for exploring such epistemologies.

A Talent for Life

A key problem with dominant framings of vulnerability is their tendency to misrepresent the vulnerable as lacking capacity and power (Butler, 2021). Moreover, the binary thinking underpinning these formulations (i.e., vulnerable vs. resilient) overlooks the intimate, non-oppositional relationships through which resilience and vulnerability emerge – an argument I will develop further in succeeding chapters. Indeed, a more nuanced understanding, advanced by Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2008), suggests that even in conditions of extreme precarity, there is an inherent human capacity for persistence, adaptation, and finding meaning – what she powerfully terms *a talent for life*. As Scheper-Hughes argues (2008, pp. 36–37), “for those living in constant crisis and subject to repetitive traumas, and where ‘emergency’ is not the exception but the rule, the conventional wisdom and understanding of human vulnerability and resilience ... [are] inadequate.” In places such as the Philippines, where calamities

are part of the “normal” (Bankoff, 2003), understanding this talent for life through epistemologies of the vulnerable is highly relevant.

Going against the grain of common discourses on vulnerability in disaster studies, von Meding and Chmutina (2023) highlight how vulnerability can be a site for liberatory praxis. Drawing from feminist theory, they view vulnerability as a “framework that centres the strength and disobedience of oppressed and marginalised people” rather than solely as a position of weakness (von Meding & Chmutina 2023, p. 366). Eschewing formulations of vulnerability as an individual property that merely exposes one to harm, they draw attention to its relational aspects, viewing it as a site for agency, resistance, solidarity and, I would add, care. Vulnerability, then, can be seen as a mobilizing force to contest hegemonic viewpoints shaping current resilience thinking – potentially engendering alternative political-ethical models of responding to risk and imagining different post-disaster futures (Figure 1.1). In this sense, there is a need to revalue vulnerability not as a state of powerlessness but as a constitutive, shared, and potentially generative condition of embodied life (Browne et al., 2021; Gilson, 2014). This revaluation has significant implications for how we view resilience – if vulnerability is not a “thing” to be eliminated or fixed through a slew of technocentric interventions, then what role does resilience play in the everyday experiences of risk and crisis?

Thus, I employ epistemologies of the vulnerable to engage with the ontological politics of resilience. By ontological politics I mean a politics involving



Figure 1.1 Communities mobilize to ask for release of funds for a post-Yolanda housing project in Tacloban

how problems are framed, how bodies are molded, and how lives are valued and shaped toward aspirations for resilient futures (Simon & Randalls, 2016, p. 6). By siting resilience in the embodied realities of those most affected by crisis, epistemologies of the vulnerable enable an understanding of how dominant formulations of resilience frame and enact notions of responsibility, security, and care. They also help illuminate *conditions of possibility* that give things their form and mode of being amidst insecurity, risk, and uncertainty.

From a feminist perspective, epistemologies of the vulnerable advance ways of knowing attentive to “everyday needs, embodied interactions and labours as well as emotional and affective relations with the environments and natures where we live” (Harris, 2015, p. 158). Beginning with women’s situated knowledges, how might epistemologies of the vulnerable then aid us in exploring the potentiality of resilience? In this book, I approach this question by arguing that this concept enables us to engage with and rework dominant understandings of resilience through two key avenues: (1) foregrounding the experiences, relationships, and aspirations embodied by the vulnerable, and (2) unmooring resilience from its (neoliberal) ethical underpinnings, as problematized by various critics. The first avenue is explored in the following section, and the second is accomplished by establishing feminist ethics of care as a moral and political framework.

Everyday, Embodied, Emotional

Examining women’s everyday embodied realities can help lay bare and confront the epistemological tensions in “resilience-building” efforts and propel “alternative sensibilities of what matters” in disaster recovery (Harris, 2015, p. 164). Revealing these tensions and attuning to these “alternative sensibilities” come about by bringing to focus aspects of disaster recovery that are habitually neglected in conventional approaches.

First, re-centering women’s experiences renews emphasis on different scales of analysis and negotiations that are relevant, if not essential, to disaster recovery. Often, totalizing discourses on development and the environment focus on a scalar politics that privilege national, state, or global scales and render the notion of the local as insignificant. This is most evident in the global discourses surrounding climate change, for example. Contributions of feminist political ecology to scholarship on environmental governance have foregrounded the necessity of focusing on other scales of (gendered) politics and negotiation, particularly the body, the home, and community or local environs (Harcourt & Escobar, 2002), without ignoring their connections to other scales. Thus, in the analyses I present in my empirical chapters, this shifting of scales will be evident. While I engage with global discourses of resilience, I also look at the ways that resilience is operationalized at scale of the city and zoom in on micro-domains of everyday life.

Second, looking into everyday life of the vulnerable and their various embodiments of crisis re-orient inquiry to account for affective and emotional

dimensions of everyday experiences which have the potential to expand the explanatory power of existing social theories on recovery. For example, a focus on affective dimensions helps us to better conceptualize and understand how emotions influence the ways in which people access, use, and struggle over space and resources, and why. In disaster contexts, concepts like “place attachment” (Oliver-Smith, 2010) provide insights as to why people might prefer to remain in areas considered “dangerous” or “hazard-prone.” From a political ecology perspective, affect and emotions bridge the gap between meaning and materiality and “[collapse] a number of binary representations that limit anthropological analysis of people and cultural practices” and their relationship to nature and the environment (Barrios, 2017, p. 6).

Bringing to light whose emotive attachments to which desired post-disaster futures are privileged over others would help us recognize that emotions and affect are also “politically active positionalities” (Barrios, 2017, p. 47) that resonate with, or run counter to, discursive formations about rebuilding for the better.

A Feminist Ethics of Care: A Moral and Political Framework

Situated at the heart of dominant resilience thinking and practice is the creation of an ethic – of becoming self-sufficient, adaptive, and responsible for one’s own survival. A close reading of the critical literature on resilience would reveal that critiques are not only aimed at the effects of resilience practices but also at the *ethos* through which resilience operates. To be able to re-imagine and re-orient resilience, it first needs to be un-grounded from its neoliberal ethical underpinnings.

The lived realities experienced by those most affected by disasters reveal the profound inadequacy of the neoliberal view that societies are made up of discrete, self-reliant, autonomous moral selves (Robinson, 2008). On the contrary, what stands out in contexts of disaster recovery in particular, is the notion of *need* and how such needs are met, not through self-centered acts of individual survival but through relationships of support and care (Aldrich, 2015; Cretney & Bond, 2014; Oliver-Smith, 1999). Mutual aid – or networks of care which enable communities to address shared needs in times of adversity – has been a feature of societies across different contexts with a far longer history than modern disaster response systems and humanitarian aid (Kropotkin, 1902; Spade, 2020).

While the idea of “care” – broadly defined here as the relational practices that sustain human and more-than-human life – has long been a central domain of feminist theorizing (Gilligan, 1993; Held, 2006; Noddings, 1986; Robinson, 2015; Tronto, 1993; Tronto & Fisher, 1990), it does not often find itself in conversations about disaster management, resilience-building, and crisis governance (Branicki, 2020). This is interesting because studies have illuminated how community disaster preparedness and recovery are in fact reliant on care – more specifically on mobilizing women’s labors and care-based practices (Albuero-Cañete, 2022; 2024; Bradshaw, 2014). In relation to this, feminist scholars writing on earth-care labor, such as Barca (2020) and Harcourt (2023),

further demonstrate that this often unpaid care work forms the very basis of social and ecological reproduction, remaining largely invisible within dominant economic paradigms. And yet because dominant constructions of resilience privilege an ontology of autonomy, women's care work is instrumentalized, undervalued, naturalized, and obscured from view. This systemic erasure is a key mechanism of neoliberal governance. Said differently, there is a pervasive under-recognition of the importance of care work and relations as well as of *caring values* in hegemonic resilience practices. This under-recognition not only places – to a large extent – the burden of building resilience on the backs of women, but it also hinders possibilities for conceptualizing resilience and disaster recovery in ways that are attuned to people's lived realities and relations of interdependency.

I aim to broaden the relevance of care to resilience by positioning feminist ethics of care as an alternative to the neoliberal ethos of responsabilization that it has come to be coupled with. Current trends in resilience thinking dwell on the imperative of individuals to overcome vulnerability through techniques of responsible self-government (Bracke, 2016b; Rose & Lentzos, 2017); a feminist ethics of care finds its purpose in the recognition of shared vulnerability which highlights interdependence and the need for mutual responsibility (Browne et al., 2021; Robinson, 2015). I argue that it is this latter view of vulnerability that more appropriately reflects people's embodied realities and needs, especially in disaster contexts. This re-orientation resonates with calls to reshape broader economic and development thinking and practice, positioning care as a fundamental value that displaces the relentless pursuit of growth. Such a “care-full” economy would prioritize collective well-being, social justice, and environmental sustainability, rather than individual accumulation.

It is important to note that a feminist ethics of care does not always sit well among the broad base of feminist scholars. Among the discomforts that feminists have raised against ethics of care is the concern over essentialism – that because care has been intimately associated with women and reproductive work, it has at times been interpreted as reifying the stereotype of the nurturing wife/mother/daughter and reinforcing the public and private divide (Card, 1990; Dietz, 1985; O'Neill, 1990). This is especially true in gendered disaster and climate change discourses: women, particularly from the Global South, are depicted not only as vulnerable but also to a great extent as “nurturing mothers” tasked to care for their family and home in times of shocks and stresses (Arora-Jonsson, 2011; MacGregor, 2006; Resurrección, 2017). However, Joan Tronto's work provides the decisive political framework for my argument. She writes:

To recognize the value of care calls into question the structure of values in our society. Care is not a parochial concern of women, a type of secondary moral question, or the work of the least well off in society. Care is a central concern of human life. It is time to change our political and social institutions to reflect this truth.

(Tronto 1993, p. 180)

From this perspective, a feminist ethics of care as applied to resilience practices does not valorize how women's care work is indispensable to family and community recovery but focuses instead on how the need for care in times of crisis can be recognized and addressed in ways that expose, challenge, and reshape relations of power that govern discourses, dispositions, and policies surrounding resilience. Beyond a moral imperative, feminist political ecologists foreground care as a profound politics of everyday life. This perspective reveals how the practices of caring – *about*, *for*, and *with* – are sites of both constraint and resistance, where marginalized communities continually negotiate survival and assert alternative visions of well-being against dominant extractive and individualistic logics. Moreover, care, as I will later demonstrate, is not confined to relationships among people. Care is also very much embedded in more-than-human relations (Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018; Haraway, 2016; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

In the chapters that follow, care will be a recurring theme. My discussion highlights how care is central to disaster recovery but can also be deployed in disempowering ways. Learning from women's everyday, embodied, and emotional experiences, I look into how care is imposed as an obligation, on one hand. On the other hand, I also bring to light how women are mobilized by care to pursue aspirations for disaster recovery. In Chapter 5, I demonstrate how I employ a feminist ethics of care as a moral basis for re-orienting resilience and therefore position care as a regenerative practice. I privilege the concept of regeneration rather than rebuilding in order to emphasize how disaster recovery must be an undertaking that seeks not only to rebuild (even for the better) what has been destroyed; but also and most importantly, to “repair” our worlds (Tronto, 1993) by reshaping our relationships to it and the values that underpin such relationships in more caring ways.

An Invitation

As a performative practice, academic research *is* activism; it participates in bringing new realities into being. Our role as academics has thus dramatically changed. We are less required to function as critics who excavate and assess what has already occurred, and more and more pushed to adopt the stance of experimental researchers, opening to what can be learned from what is happening on the ground. To put this in the form of a mandate, *we are being called to read the potentially positive futures barely visible in the present order of things, and to imagine how to strengthen and move them along.*

(Gibson-Graham & Roelvink, 2010, p. 342; emphasis mine)

It can be said that resilience is itself a resilient concept. It has multiple meanings and has been adapted to suit various settings, applied at different scales, and deployed in different ways across a range of academic disciplines. Resilience is particularly prominent in the field of disaster and environmental management. Rooted in ecological thinking, resilience has allowed us to think about disasters

and environmental change as occurring through the interplay of social and natural forces. This construction of resilience is useful as it facilitates important interdisciplinary discussions regarding the connectedness of human activity and environmental processes.

However, resilience is not value-neutral. As critical scholars have rightly called into question, hegemonic deployments of the term tend to uphold and advance neoliberal and capitalist ideologies and ethics. These dominant ways of applying resilience, particularly in contexts of disaster reconstruction and recovery, tend to elide issues of power, justice, and equity, thereby inviting critics to label resilience as essentially conservative and anti-poor. Moreover, concerns have been raised as to how resilience is used as a governance tool to serve neoliberal citizenship projects: shaping the subjectivities of people to embrace the ethos of neoliberalism through responsibilization.

While acknowledging the role of critique in exposing this more insidious side of resilience, I have argued in this chapter that resilience can be reclaimed and reimagined. I have thus regarded resilience as potentiality – a concept that we could certainly wield to support the creation of a more just, equitable, and alternative world. I have drawn from feminist standpoint epistemology and feminist political ecology in order to develop an approach that would enable us to explore such potentiality. Specifically, I have advanced the idea of epistemologies of the vulnerable to reconceptualize resilience by centering women's everyday, embodied, and emotional lives as a starting point for exploring alternative possibilities. In developing this concept, I have positioned a feminist ethics of care as an ethical standpoint for broadening and reshaping the ontological orientation of resilience.

Returning to the opening of this chapter, the “stop calling me resilient!” campaign drives home a potent message about how building back better from disaster should not be carried out at the expense of the vulnerable, in the way that I have come to employ the term here. And indeed, it has been the voices of the vulnerable that have posed the most compelling challenge to resilience practices that resulted in dispossession and exclusion. When I heard of this campaign, I saw it as an invitation to explore the importance and power of situated knowledges to critically examine the institutional processes that govern lives after a disaster, and from those knowledges, strive to enact different pathways of being and becoming.

As I have highlighted in this chapter, when an understanding of disaster recovery recognizes how the role of power, the situatedness of recovery practices, and the formation of subjective identities and affective relations are entangled in processes of becoming “resilient,” then our theorizing can begin to raise critical and normative questions that shape how we envision post-disaster futures.

Notes

- 1 I employ the term “hegemony” to refer broadly to ideas and practices that have become so normalized that alternatives are *seemingly* unavailable (Harris, 2015). While deeply contested, such ideas are nonetheless widely accepted, promoted, and enacted in policy and institutionalized practice.

- 2 Timebank is anchored on the philosophy that each individual has skills that can be exchanged at equal value. In this system, one can earn credits for services provided to others which can be exchanged for other services (childcare, teaching, carpentry, and so on).

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2 Benevolent Discipline

Building a “Better” Tacloban

When I first visited the Tacloban City Hall in 2017, what I immediately noticed were the posters spread out across the entrance which communicated the new vision of Tacloban following the tragedy of Yolanda: to become resilient, vibrant, and liveable. One poster provided a visual summary of the master plan for the development of Tacloban North, where communities previously living along the coast were being relocated (Figure 2.1). The poster featured modern designs of public buildings and roads – a regional hospital, a public market, a campus for the University of the Philippines Tacloban, a bus terminal, a highway, and green open spaces. While most posters emphasized the city’s vision for reconstruction, one poster focused on the government itself. It highlighted the city government’s “Resilient Leadership,” showing photographs of the city mayor speaking at public events, interacting with ordinary citizens, and personally visiting coastal areas which were labelled as ‘danger zones’ after the disaster (Figure 2.2). At the bottom of the poster, it read: “*Make Tacloban the template of a people’s resolve to rise above their sorrow and create the new landscape of their future.*”

Following Yolanda, a dream for rebuilding Tacloban as a “model resilient city” was galvanized (TACDEV, 2014). These aspirations certainly became apparent in the visual representations of reconstruction plans. I was immediately struck by how the discourse of resilience pervaded the government’s narratives of recovery and reconstruction and how this was translated into master plans which promised to deliver a modern Tacloban. This vision was encapsulated by the slogan, *Diri la bangon – better!* [Not only rise up – [but be] better!]. Yet, after the many conversations I had with city officials and residents of resettlement communities – who often spoke about their encounters with each other in affective and familiar terms, and who responded emotionally to reconstruction plans, programs, and their representations (e.g., warning signs, maps and posters) – I would go back to the images in these posters and see something more.

Along with the discourse of “resilient” recovery, the posters also depicted a particular image and characteristic of the state – as one that was embodied, tangible, and even outwardly *benevolent*, especially toward people which it



Figure 2.1 Tacloban Master Plan poster at the Tacloban City Hall

RESILIENT

LEADERSHIP

Typhoon Ruby provided us an opportunity to apply our learnings from the Yolanda experience. The City Government tracked the approach of the storm and various projections of its trajectory 24/7, and made the rounds through vulnerable coastal communities to make sure that everyone has evacuated. Tacloban emerged from the onslaught of Typhoon Ruby with zero casualty.



Mayor Alfred has brought Tacloban City's learnings from the Yolanda experience to various International conferences, including the World Cities Summit in Singapore, the United Nations Climate Summit in New York City, the World Reconstruction Conference in Washington, D.C., and a conference of city mayors in Jerusalem.

"Make Tacloban the template of a people's firm resolve to rise above their sorrow and create the new landscape of their future."

- Mayor Alfred S. Romualdez

. I ♥ TACLOBAN

Figure 2.2 Resilient Leadership poster at the Tacloban City Hall

considered “vulnerable.” It was a state which recognized people’s “sorrow” and framed rebuilding as an act of collectively rising above these sorrows to achieve the desire for a resilient/modern future. I then realized that the specific affective qualities displayed by the state in these instances were not simply epiphenomenal to the politics of reconstruction – but rather lay at the very *heart* of it. Beyond an understanding of the state as a disembodied, amorphous entity characterized by a seemingly rational set of government practices, I began to see how the state itself was an active social subject in Tacloban’s reconstruction (Aretxaga, 2003; Laszczkowski & Reeves, 2015). As such, it was intimately implicated in the daily practices of recovery of ordinary women and men in disaster-affected communities, constantly encountered in the “minute texture of everyday life” (Gupta, 2012, p. 75). On one hand, it was a state that discharged its duties through bureaucratic processes but, on the other hand, it was a state which demonstrated the capability to harbor desires, enact fantasies, and elicit – as well as inculcate – emotions and values among those it governed and endeavored to make “better.” These observed qualities of the state, as I argue in this chapter, play a critical role in affecting and shaping everyday experiences of recovery. I posit that a focus on such qualities helps expose the potentialities of power that have previously been obscured in studies of disaster reconstruction (Barrios, 2017).

Specifically in this chapter, I demonstrate how the state “acquires a tangible, affective, and spatial reality” (Laszczkowski & Reeves, 2015, p. 6) in the process of rebuilding, which moves people toward certain ethical formations that prescribe how they should behave, respond to, and even *feel* toward visions, initiatives, and strategies for “resilient” recovery. I contend that the particular mobilization of affect, discourse, and ethics exposes a novel form of authority and governing that has dramatically shaped the ways in which disaster-affected communities have experienced and made sense of life after a disaster. Inspired by Foucault’s ideas on governmentality and disciplinary power (1991; 1995), I introduce the concept of *benevolent discipline* to characterize a mode of governing animated by the state’s narratives and performances of benevolence as a way of regulating its constituents’ thoughts, behaviors, and feelings in the context of disaster recovery. I detail how benevolent discipline is enacted through the application of *affective technologies of recovery*, which I define as governance tools, and techniques that operate through, and draw power from, discourse and the emotive and affective responses they elicit.

To demonstrate how a state could appropriate and exhibit benevolence and compassion in pursuit of specific goals for improvement (or, in this case, resilience), I first expound on what I mean by affective qualities of the state. I engage with some key understandings regarding how the state governs and how affect is a central, rather than a peripheral, dimension of governing, especially in the post-disaster context. I show how such affective qualities are embodied by the city government of Tacloban, its, agents, and officials.¹ I then draw attention to the *objects* of the state’s benevolence: informal settlers in urban poor communities of Tacloban. Specifically, I highlight how the state, mainly

through the city government, re-formulates its stance in relation to urban informality – from being generally aversive to seemingly compassionate – by deploying the discourse of safety as an underlying narrative of the state’s “noble intentions” to relocate thousands of informal settlers from prime coastal areas to the city’s northern peripheries. Along with post-disaster housing reconstruction and resettlement, which the state prescribes as an antidote to informality as a form of “vulnerability,” I identify a suite of interventions and technologies designed to “discipline” these specific communities toward becoming responsible and resilient. This exposition on how the state performs benevolent discipline on its subjects is a critical foundation for the succeeding chapters in this book. First, it provides us with an understanding of how resilience is inscribed in the local context of Tacloban; and, second, it foregrounds how resilience-building unfolds in and through complex political, affective, and ethical terrains of disaster recovery and reconstruction.

Feeling Like a State

In *Affective States*, Stoler (2007) challenges the notion of the state as mainly rational and bureaucratically-driven, arguing that such “political rationalities” are in fact grounded in the management of affect. She compels us to rethink previous conceptions of the emotively neutral state and instead recognize how state bureaucracies function through the production and circulation of emotions – fear, disgust, hope, pride, and so on. As Gupta (2012, p. 113) states, “affect needs to be seen as one of the constitutive conditions of state formation,” given the extent to which emotions are “embedded in the narratives and actions” of the state through its various agents. Here I regard the state not as a unitary coherent entity (Gupta, 2012; Navaro-Yashin, 2012), but as an assemblage of institutions, processes, and (embodied) practices (Trouillot, 2001) working at different levels, and reified in and through everyday encounters “between citizens, state agents, and the dispersed material traces of state power” (Laszczkowski & Reeves, 2015, p. 3).

While affect and emotions have been defined in different and sometimes contradictory ways, I briefly explain first what I mean by affect and how it is associated with emotions as I deploy these terms in this chapter. Affect has at times been regarded as an unqualified pre-social or pre-subjective intensity or energy that is felt by the body but is not necessarily recognized, articulated, or named. In contrast, emotion has been understood as an intensity that has subjective content and brought into the ambit of the social – feelings which we come to know and name, for example, as love, happiness, or grief (see also Anderson, 2014; Massumi, 1995; Thrift, 2008). From a feminist perspective, however, I resist the tendency to view affect and emotion in such a dualistic way. This dualism privileges binaries constructed along nature/culture and material/ideational divides which, as feminist scholars have long argued, is counterproductive to understanding the relationships between the body, knowledge, and power (Ahall, 2018). Rather, I draw insight from Sara Ahmed’s

(2014, p. 210) analogy of the distinction between affect and emotion to an egg: “That they can be separated, does not mean that they are separate.” Thus, affect here is the embodied, sensorial way of being produced in and through human practices as well as within human and non-human (or more-than-human) interactions (see Navaro-Yashin, 2012). Emotion is an “affective experience” which is narrativized by people within a particular social-cultural milieu (Barrios, 2017). I maintain that affect is not disentangled from emotion and the creation of meaning (or discourse), nor from its relations to social and non-human environments.

Post-disaster situations are undeniably emotionally laden and affectively charged environments. In various disaster experiences, it is not uncommon for states to assume a posturing of care and concern for affected populations, and invoke solidarity in shared suffering and hopes for recovery – even if such posturing has also often been challenged and critiqued by the very objects of the state’s affections (Parson, 2016; Schuller, 2016). To explore the affective dimensions of state practice in such situations, I set out three interrelated ways of thinking about the state’s affective qualities that inform my conceptualization of benevolent discipline.

Affect as the State’s Object-Target

In *Encountering Affect*, Ben Anderson (2014) draws on Michel Foucault’s concept of *apparatus* to demonstrate how affective life is dynamically related to diverse modalities of power. Foucault’s conceptualizations of governmentality and biopolitics have become very influential analytical perspectives in understanding how the modern state governs and controls bodies and populations. Such control is attained through the use of a heterogeneous ensemble of discursive and non-discursive elements (or apparatuses), i.e., built forms, institutions, laws, administrative processes, statistics, maps, speeches, and so on (Anderson, 2012; 2014). Anderson introduces the notion of affect as the *object-target* of such apparatuses. By object-target, he refers specifically to how affective life becomes an object of power and a target for intervention. As Grove (2014) explains, engineering affect is vital to the operation of modern liberal orders or “control societies” where “[such] societies harness the transmission of affect through techniques that alter how bodies can relate to one another in an emergent milieu” (see also Deleuze, 1995; Grove, 2014, p. 247).

Linking affect as object-target to state practices in disaster contexts, we find that eliciting specific forms of emotions and affective responses toward state projects of recovery and reconstruction can be a powerful mode of governing. Two examples demonstrate this point. In *Capitalizing on Catastrophe*, Alex de Waal (2008) in his Foreword observes, “[w]henver a community is ‘reconstructed’ after a disaster, it is a chance for a bureaucracy to register people, and bring them more directly into its embrace.” The act of registering beneficiaries for government aid can be seen as a classic example of what Scott (1998) refers to as *legibility* practices – “rendering technical” (Li, 2007) aspects of life in

order to make them calculable, measurable, and manageable. However, beyond legibility as a state practice of control, registration can simultaneously engender feelings of hope and gratitude – or conversely, anxiety, sleeplessness, or a sense of restlessness – among disaster survivors whose access to much-needed aid depends on whether or not they are able to have their names and their families listed as beneficiaries (see, for example, Alburo-Cañete, 2014). Capitalizing on these feelings, be they hope, gratitude, or anxiety, further grants the state power to demand compliance to an array of conditionalities attached to becoming a beneficiary.

The second example demonstrates the relationship between affect and planning. In an ethnographic study of recovery planning in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, Roberto Barrios (2017) shows how experts and planners sought to persuade residents to accept their plans for reconstructing a specific area of the city as a new space for capital investment. He noted how architects and planners used bright colors and texture in the presentation of the plans and proposed architectural forms – a beautiful boulevard lined with trees, with cafes, shops, and grocery stores associated with a cosmopolitan lifestyle – to provoke responses of pleasure and desire from residents participating in the planning process. By appropriating *visual and tactile aesthetics* as a tool to convince residents to agree to the recovery plan, planners hoped to generate the necessary affective investments in the vision for reconstruction to lend it legitimacy.

These examples show that recovery and reconstruction activities, while entrenched in administrative processes, are actually grounded in the careful cultivation, manipulation, and re-patterning of emotions (Barrios, 2017). This demonstrates a facet of the “affective state” which regards affects and emotions as object-targets of its power to attain specific goals – such as advancing a modernist/capitalist agenda through disaster reconstruction as in the case of New Orleans and elsewhere (see Klein 2007).

The State as an Object of Affect and Emotions

Recent studies of bureaucratic practices of, and engagements with, the state have stimulated an exploration of the state itself as a site of affective investments (Laszczkowski & Reeves, 2015). The yearning for a “good paternalistic state” (Aretxaga, 2003, p. 396) that provides care and takes responsibility for ensuring the welfare of its citizens is often set in contrast with narratives of state corruption, abandonment, neglect, and even terror (Aretxaga, 2000; Gupta, 2012; High, 2014). Ideals of *how the state should be* can generate a range of emotions – often ambivalent, many intense – that animate people’s relations with the state. In disaster contexts particularly, the role of the state as primary responder, provider of relief, and refuge cannot be understated. Such expectations are undergirded by affective intensities directed toward the state and its embodied agents.

In examining the aftermath of the 2010 Chilean earthquake, for example, Parson (2016) narrates how people expressed dissatisfaction over the perceived inability of the state to adequately provide for their needs. Affected low-income

communities labeled their conditions explicitly as “mistreatment” by the state and contested the state’s projections of compassion by calling the state’s apparent neglect a “moral earthquake” (Parson, 2016, p. 101). This discontent sparked a national movement for fair reconstruction in Chile to compel the state to provide dignified housing and other services to communities. The findings of Parson’s study also resonate with the observations gathered in previous research I conducted in Iligan City, the Philippines, in 2012, among people who lived in emergency camps following the disaster triggered by Tropical Storm *Sendong* (internationally known as Washi). Feelings of resentment were exhibited toward the state over the supposed failure to fast-track provision of permanent shelters (Albuero-Cañete, 2014). This often led to tense encounters between people living in the camps and their respective camp managers who were state personnel deployed to oversee camp operations. Such perceptions of state neglect had fueled indignation among groups of internally displaced people living in the camps and sparked protests to hold the state to account.

In these examples, the state is at the receiving end of people’s (adverse) sentiments, its authority to govern affected by how people act on these emotions. It is important to note, however, that while the cases cited here mainly highlighted people’s negative affective responses toward the state, the state in fact is very much an object of mixed emotions or conflicting attachments (Steinmuller, 2015). Although the state can and has become an object of resentment or contempt, feelings of hope can also be invested in the state at the same time (Curato, 2017; High, 2014; Jansen, 2014). What these examples consequently underscore is the importance for the state to be able to project a particular posturing of care, especially in disaster contexts – and to have that caring stance affectively resonate with people – in order to maintain the legitimacy of its operations. While legitimacy is not solely contingent on the state’s ability to perform “care” – indeed, others have addressed crises with abandonment and neglect (see Davies, 2013, on Chernobyl) – affective investments in the state aid in legitimizing recovery initiatives.

The State as an Affective Social Subject

While the state is an object of affect and governs through interventions targeting affective life, it also has a subjective life. Indeed, having an affective relationship with people means that the state materializes and acts in multiple and often intimate ways in everyday life (Laszczkowski & Reeves, 2015, p. 10). Although the impact of state power is uneven depending on the sites in which the state is engaged, at the local level, such power is encountered “close to the skin” and “embodied in well-known local officials” and state agents operating on the ground (Aretxaga, 2003, p. 396; see also Jakimow, 2018). In this sense, the state acquires a tangible character, unlocatable at any single site of power but actively ever-present and recognizable through its multiple effects (Trouillot, 2001). As a “phenomenological reality” (Aretxaga, 2003), the state impresses upon bodies various affective energies, discursive practices, as well as enactments of its own fantasies and desires (Siegel, 1998), as it is reified in everyday encounters and discourse.

Disaster settings provide the environment where this subjective dynamic between people and those actors which embody the state unfold and become more apparent. Loss and devastation give way to heightened affective engagements with the state, in its multiple forms, and bring to life powerful encounters in determining the ways forward from the disaster and negotiating life and death – figuratively and also quite literally. As an affective social subject, the state often displays contradictory qualities – coercive and caring, cruel and benevolent – played out in everyday engagements with people, aid organizations, and other social institutions. The state can be chastised for inattentiveness and incompetence in managing emergency situations (Schuller, 2016) or praised for its sympathy toward disaster survivors (Curato, 2017). These engagements eventually shape how the state responds to such situations and recalculates the ways in which it positions itself in public. Moreover, the state’s agents are in fact also emotional beings and can act out feelings of frustration, pity, anger, and even helplessness in the course of performing their roles in crisis settings. In other words, the state in its many incarnations possesses both the *capacity to affect* as well as the *susceptibility to be affected* (Anderson, 2014; Jakimow, 2020), thereby endowing it with an affective social life.

Consideration of the affective qualities of the state tempers conceptualizations of statecraft that construct the state as a callous, calculating, and unfeeling machine that simply controls and manipulates people to achieve state aims for improvement (Kapoor, 2017). In Tania Murray Li’s (2007, p. 5) account of her own encounters with officials, bureaucrats, and other development actors and experts – whom she refers to as “trustees” – she observes how intentions are often benevolent, utopian, and concerned with the achievement of a “higher good.” The position of trustee, according to Li (2007, p. 4), is defined by “the claim to know how others should live, what is best for them, to know what they need.” And yet the application of technical expertise claimed by trustees to determine which sorts of lives are worth living are also driven by a desire to make the world better (Li, 2007, p. 4), according to specific ways of thinking about improvement. What this reflection demonstrates is that (state) power is *never impersonal* but rather “it is always passionately invested” (Kapoor, 2017, p. 2667). These passions and desires are qualified and politicized through discourse (Navaro-Yashin, 2012), which in turn generates “embodied and sensual effects” (Aretxaga, 2003).

The city government of Tacloban, I argue, embodies the above affective qualities that enable it to pursue its fantasies of achieving a utopian vision of a modern/resilient city. Below, I demonstrate the ways in which the state, particularly through the local government,² represents itself as a benevolent authority in post-Yolanda reconstruction. The city government thus invites positive feelings toward itself to lend potency to its modernist rationalities that underpin Build Back Better reconstruction. Through the concept of benevolent discipline. I hope to facilitate an understanding of how the planned ways of carrying out improvements involve to a great extent instituting ways of thinking, behaving, and feeling around changes introduced to socio-spatial arrangements,

livelihoods, housing, local environments, and community life. Here, affect and discourse are together mobilized to inscribe state fantasies of resilience, modernity, and a specific form of moral development onto “vulnerable” bodies. Through this exposition, I show how the rhetoric of altruism and the mobilization of affect coalesce and consequently act as mechanisms of dispossession and marginalization.

The Workings of the “Benevolent” State

A conversation I had with an official at the Tacloban City Hall in 2017 dwelled on the intractable issue of housing and resettlement of nearly 90,000 people from the coastal areas to Tacloban North. More than five years after the disaster, resettlement continued to be among the greatest challenges for post-disaster urban planning and governance. One of the main thrusts of the city government, the official said, was to ensure that all the families located in the “danger zones” would be moved to relatively safer ground. This was a key initiative toward the city’s efforts to Build Back Better and strengthen resilience. It was a very difficult undertaking, she said, but one that was necessary, given the devastatingly high death toll caused by the storm surges during Typhoon Yolanda. “Why did the city decide on moving all these people to the north?” I asked. She answered:

Anywhere in the world, there’s no such thing as a safe place. You just have to choose which option is the lesser evil ... why is it safe in the north? Because of all the places in Tacloban, this is the only area located ten meters above sea level. Where are these displaced people from? All of them are from coastal areas ... So first of all, you need to know your non-negotiables. *Lives are non-negotiable*, livelihoods can come later ... People are complaining at the moment because there is still a lack of livelihood [in the north]. But the city is providing them with the support services they need ... You know, the city government had originally intended for that relocation site to be an economic zone. So, the city *sacrificed* [that plan] in order to prioritize resettlement ... the city must prioritize protection of people’s lives, protection of people’s properties

(emphasis added)

I then asked the question, “How did you manage to convince people to move?” to which she replied, “People had just experienced the disaster, they were afraid. [With that], we did not have difficulties convincing people to move.”

One of the most striking aspects of this exchange was the way in which the state’s narrative regarding resettlement of coastal communities is imbued with paternalistic hues – driven by the need to protect people’s lives and ensure their safety. Such narrative expressed by the official was also encoded in all the reconstruction and development plans in response to the Yolanda disaster (CDRRM Council, 2016; TACDEV, 2014; TCPDO, 2016; 2017). With the

statement that the city had “sacrificed” its economic interests by prioritizing resettlement over the development of an economic zone in the north, a point was clearly articulated: that we were in the presence of a *benevolent state* which pursued reconstruction with the best interests of its citizens at heart.

Equally interesting was how the said official acknowledged that *fear* of a similar disaster played an important role in relocation. While she did not say that they used fear to sway people’s decisions, fear itself was a pivotal factor in getting people to agree on the necessity of relocation. Another official said that they used results of disaster risk assessments to show people why it was *not safe* to continue living in the affected coastal areas, as their recent experience had confirmed. “We told them, it’s not us who did the assessment. We had the national government like the Environmental Management Bureau, Mines and Geosciences. We have PHIVOLCS,”³ he said, emphasizing how the decision to resettle specific communities was validated by science-based expert knowledge.

I began this section with an account of my encounters with city officials to demonstrate how the reconstruction of Tacloban is structured by affective relations and engagements between the state and its citizens. I highlight how altruistic representations (i.e., sacrificing one’s own interests for the safety of the people) frame state performances of Building Back Better. By altruistic representations, I mainly refer to representations that emerge from everyday practices of state agencies and personnel rather than the overt and spectacular displays consumed through the mass media and other public avenues (Gupta, 2012; Parson, 2016). This affective positioning of the state allows for the management of emotions, such as fear which, as the interview above shows, is a powerful technique and a *condition* for moving people to comply with the state’s plans for urban re-design. Bearing these in mind, I focus on how the principle of Building Back Better is assimilated into the post-disaster social landscape of Tacloban City through the discourse of safety and how such assimilation is carried out through benevolent discipline.

To understand how benevolent discipline is employed in this context, I propose that we view recovery and reconstruction as sites where discursive practices and affective work are constantly performed not simply to rebuild from destruction and govern life after disaster, but to produce *new life-worlds* that alter the ways that people relate to themselves, others, and their environment. In this sense, affective-discursive practices constitute what Foucault (1978, 1995) refers to as disciplinary techniques that operate on “the capacities and desires of individual bodies” (Grove, 2014, p. 247), in order to shape them into amenable subjects of the newly re-constructed socio-spatial order. Governing such bodies relies on the circulation of certain “truths” which are legitimated, institutionalized, and normalized to regulate behavior (Foucault, 1980). Consequently, the legitimation of truths goes hand in hand with managing affective life – mobilizing sentiments, “educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs” (Li, 2007, p. 5) of those whom the state seeks to improve. In Tacloban, not only does the state operate on affective life and relations as objects of disciplinary actions, but it also directs affective attachments to itself by emulating qualities of benevolence to sustain the legitimacy of its rebuilding efforts.

Thus, rebuilding better becomes an effect of embodied meaning-making and of disciplinary techniques which elevate a form of “valued life” that the state considers productive and desirable (Anderson, 2012, p. 30). This is set in contrast to a *devalued* form of life that runs counter to the state’s anticipatory logics⁴ of resilience-building and to its vision of social and moral order. The act of disciplining, therefore, requires a referent object – usually groups or populations which are regarded as “defective” (or “vulnerable”) and in need of correction (Li, 2007). The discourse of safety employed by the city government involves a specific understanding of what constitutes disaster vulnerability and *who* are considered vulnerable: informal settlers in urban poor communities who populated Tacloban’s “dangerous” southern coasts. Both the discourse of safety and the benevolent stance are shown to qualify the ways in which so-called “squatter” communities⁵ from the “danger zones” become subjected to disciplinary measures during resettlement in the name of building back better.

Informal Settlers and the City

As a highly urbanized city, Tacloban serves as an economic hub in the Eastern Visayas region which produced intense competition for urban space, even before the onset of typhoon Yolanda (Atienza et al., 2019). Its rapid urbanization over the last few decades and the economic opportunities this presented have attracted migrants from neighboring towns and provinces. However, the contradiction of unaffordable property values and the need to access centrally located urban space (Shatkin, 2004) have resulted in the growth of informal settlements housing most of Tacloban’s urban poor. Although informal settlers and workers are often viewed as messy, chaotic, and a stark contrast to norms of aesthetics in “world-class city-making” (Ghertner, 2015), they form a vital part of local economies, like that of Tacloban, which rely on the mobilization of cheap labor for the provision of crucial services. Informal settlers have thus formed an ambiguous relationship with state power over the years (see Kusno, 2016). On one hand, they are recognized for their contributions to the local economy as well as being a source of votes during elections. On the other hand, there is a prevailing perception of “squatters” as a generalized, undesirable, and dangerous “Other” (Kusno, 2016; Sibley, 1995), which is expressed and readily observable in the city’s socio-spatial organization – such communities often occupy hazard-prone spaces that are least serviced by the state (Atienza et al., 2019). The ambiguity of this relationship is demonstrated in the city government’s vacillating stance toward informal settlers in the last few years, before and after the Yolanda disaster.

Aspirations of becoming a globally competitive city had already compelled the Tacloban City Government to invest in urban redevelopment and spatial transformations to accommodate the demands for economic growth (City Planning and Development Office, 2017). The establishment of the Tacloban City Convention Center (commonly referred to as the Astrodome), the creation of a coastal road connecting the east coast to the north and a recreational

boardwalk along Cancabato Bay, and the expansion of the Daniel Z. Romualdez Airport had been among Tacloban City's priorities for infrastructure development since the early 2000s. In pursuit of these development thrusts, however, the Tacloban City Government had eventually forged hostile relationships with informal settlers in coastal areas who faced eviction as a consequence of development projects (Barbosa, 2009; Japzon, 2004). Not only did the city require to clear the space for such projects, but it also embarked on cleaning up Tacloban (Barbosa, 2009) to have it live up to its (previous) official slogan of "City of Progress, Beauty, and Love" – resonating much of former First Lady Imelda Romualdez Marcos's fixation on beautification.⁶

While the city government managed to negotiate with and move some informal settler families into state-determined and mainly upland resettlement sites north of the city center, it was not able to completely remove urban poor communities from sites of development projects. Resistance to relocation was presented by an anti-demolition alliance among informal settlers from about 15 affected communities (Japzon, 2004). During this period of evictions, especially around 2004, antagonism between the state and informal settlers sometimes led to violent confrontations, with the city government using force to demolish houses in the affected communities (Barbosa, 2009). The city government was then looked upon by those settlers as callous and insensitive to their plight (Japzon, 2004).

The question of relocating informal settlers from coastal areas, then, precedes Yolanda. The premise of urban development apparently did not sit well with several communities who faced being displaced from their environment and livelihood, which for many had constituted their ways of life and identity. Many of them were fishers who relied on the sea for their livelihood, and a lot more were engaged in both waged and informal work in areas around or near their settlements. The kind of precarity that such communities faced did not necessarily emanate from living in "dangerous" environments. It came from insecure tenurial arrangements, state policies, and urban planning rationalities that aimed to sweep away the poor in favor of development, which has been a common trend in urban planning practices in the Global South (Watson, 2009). However, the disaster that occurred during Yolanda shifted the discourse of *relocation-for-development* to the discourse of *relocation-for-safety* which served to reconfigure affective positionings between the state and informal settlers (Figure 2.3), as I discuss below.

Informality as Vulnerability

On the surface, the discourse of safety in shaping reconstruction plans in Tacloban adheres to universal calls for greater preparedness and precautions in anticipation of natural hazards, especially in the context of climate change (United Nations, 2015). This discourse is supported by urban planning logics that re-code disaster vulnerabilities into technical spatial frameworks which categorize areas as "safe" or "unsafe," applying the language of geology,



Figure 2.3 An informal settlement along a riverbank in Anibong, Tacloban City. This was one of the areas highly affected by storm surges. Since Yolanda, settlements along danger zones such as this have been targeted for relocation.

engineering, and science. Under “Strategies and Plan of Action for Recovery and Rehabilitation” of the Tacloban Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan (TRRP), a major policy action was presented under the subheading *Safety of the Population* and states:

Inadequate preparation and habitation of vulnerable areas were the conditions that contributed to the losses in lives and destruction to property when Yolanda hit. Now that the city has a clearer idea of the ‘reach’ and behavior of a super typhoon, redevelopment policies can thus direct growth to the proven safer (higher) areas of the city. Meanwhile, disaster-resilient rebuilding policies can prescribe the effective architecture and engineering provisions for future construction.

(TACDEV, 2014, p. 15)

The imperative for moving populations to safety is clear. Using the impact of Yolanda as a benchmark for post-disaster urban planning, resettlement is framed as a crucial measure to reduce people’s exposure to natural hazards, and a fundamental undertaking for Building Back Better. While the *Safety of the Population* section of the TRRP seems to be concerned with the city population in general, the following passage reveals *which* populations are to be ushered to safety in particular:

Majority of the city's informal settler families occupy the city's *high risk* areas and roughly 10,000 of the totally damaged houses from the typhoon belong to the urban poor. Given the damages and the city's hazardscape, this plan was formulated taking into account the shelter needs of the survivors as well as their *safety* from future disasters.

(TACDEV, 2014, p. 8; emphasis added)

In *Planning to Forget*, Gavin Shatkin (2004) incisively analyzes how informal settlements are often “forgotten places” for urban planning in the context of globalization (see also Yiftachel, 2009). With the increasing currency of risk reduction for building resilient cities in recent years, however, informal settlements have more and more drawn the attention of the state's gaze. In fact, within the last decade, it has not been unusual in cities across the Philippines, like Manila and Cebu, to have urban poor informal settlements targeted for eviction – especially those that are situated along areas considered “hazardous,” such as waterways, garbage dumpsites, railways, riverbanks, and coastal areas – in the name of disaster risk management (Alvarez & Cardenas, 2019; Ramalho, 2019). Relocation of such communities finds legal bases in existing Philippine laws such as the Urban Development and Housing Act of 1992 and, more recently, the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010.

What becomes apparent is that the informality of human settlements is conflated with highly technical constructions of vulnerability: flimsy housing materials, exposure to hazards, lack of sanitation and of education about hazards which contribute to increasing disaster risks (Ballesteros, 2013). We see these elements identified in *Safety of the Population*, where inadequate preparedness, habitation in vulnerable locations (or high-risk areas), and the implied insubstantiality of housing materials used in informal settlements (thus the need for “effective architecture” and “engineering”) are presented to explain why people became vulnerable to Yolanda and accompanying storm surges. By regarding informality as a form of vulnerability, relocation and regularization/formalization of housing become legitimate interventions for disaster risk reduction, as well as the education of informal settlers toward being responsible risk-aware citizens.

While the relocation of urban poor communities in the Philippines is generally laden with anti-slum and stigmatizing rhetoric (Ramalho, 2019), the (overt) narrative that pervades in Tacloban is not necessarily one of contempt for the urban poor, but rather of concern for safety and a determination to “rise above sorrows” to rebuild a resilient Tacloban City. With resettlement construed as a paternalistic (rather than aggressive) gesture, the city government's stance toward informal settlers shifted from being hostile to benevolent. By framing disaster resettlement as mainly *hazard avoidance*, the discourse of safety translated vulnerabilities in terms of geographic exposure to (primarily) storm surges, using the experience of Yolanda as a reference point. This framing is a glaring contrast to previous efforts at relocation anchored on

development and urban economic growth as an explicit primary goal. As initial displacement after Yolanda is viewed to result from natural causes (and implicitly from the carelessness of people who voluntarily live in high-risk areas), the discourse of safety deflected notions of resettlement as politically charged and therefore reduced resistance,⁷ as relocation became framed as a compassionate act.

From this exposition, I have shown how appropriation of expert knowledge, rendering technical and simplifying the otherwise complex conditions that shape people's vulnerabilities, and restructuring of affective relations come together and constitute a particular governance practice employed in the socio-spatial management of urban poor populations in Tacloban. The framing of *informality-as-vulnerability* allowed the state to target a specific population – i. e., informal settlers – for the enactment of benevolent discipline. By focusing on technical aspects of vulnerability, the state through the discourse of safety, and acting in benevolence, depoliticized the extant insecurities and structural inequalities experienced by informal settlers as they struggled to have a place in the city. Building Back Better then became an opportunity to transform the urban poor into resilient and, most importantly, *governable* subjects.

As the discourse of safety had reshaped the affective engagements and relations between the state and informal settlers, it also necessarily altered people's relationship to their environments and ways of life: the sea was no longer cast as a source of life but a bringer of death; houses made of light materials were no longer regarded as a home but as some *thing* that could be washed away. Hence, fear became a pervasive emotion that structured how people related to the sea after their experience of Yolanda (more on this in Chapter 5).

Meanwhile, affective attachments were redirected toward concrete resilient infrastructure that had no prior connections to people's own experiences, local knowledges, and life-worlds. The construction of a massive tide embankment that cordons Tacloban's shorelines, for example, clearly invited people to invest their confidence and sense of security on a modern feat of engineering (Figures 2.4 and 2.5). But what it also did was to form a concrete barrier between communities and the sea, physically and symbolically severing people's ties with the environment upon which they have depended for sustaining life over decades and generations.

Below, I illustrate how certain governmental techniques embedded in the processes of disaster reconstruction facilitate such affective investments *and* detachments to places, objects, and social environments in pursuit of the state's aims for improvement.

Disciplining Affective Life

Re-coding environments and objects as “dangerous” or “safe” provokes emotional responses that form the grounds for creating risk-averse subjects which, according to Foucault (1997; Grove, 2014), is a crucial element for liberal rule. This reworking of sentiments and values forms a medium through which so-called vulnerable communities can achieve self-mastery in addressing the



Figure 2.4 “Where do we dock our boats?” The tide embankment is a multi-million project intended to keep water out and keep communities safe. From the perspective of community members who rely on fishing, however, the tide embankment keeps people away from the sea, their source of life.



Figure 2.5 The concrete tide embankment

“unpredictability, adversity, insecurity, and uncertainty” that characterize an increasingly “risky” world (Rose & Lentzos, 2017, p. 29). Reworking sentiments, values, and affections, however, requires strategies and tools which allow for disciplinary power to be exercised on affective life.

Building on Easthope and Mort's (2014, pp. 136–138) notion of “technologies of recovery,” which they define as human and non-human instruments used to change and manage behavior in the aftermath of disaster, I advance the notion of *affective technologies of recovery* to highlight the ways in which specific governing tools and apparatuses make affective life the object-target of state power. I categorize these technologies according to two main themes that have become prominent in my research: *risk-averse* and *aspirational*. Risk-averse affective technologies are those that elicit and reinforce negative emotive responses toward conditions, places, and objects that are deemed dangerous or hazardous. Aspirational affective technologies cultivate desires and longings for a valued kind of life and conditions for living. While I have made distinctions between these types of technologies, they are by no means mutually exclusive, as fostering aversions to particular forms of risk can at the same time be activated by the inculcation of certain types of aspirations, and vice versa.

Risk-Averse Affective Technologies

To demonstrate how risk-averse affective technologies operate, I highlight three such technologies which significantly figured in Tacloban: (1) spatial classification, (2) production of hazard maps, and (3) displays of storm-surge warning signs in public areas. All these technologies capitalize on fear, trauma, insecurity, and anxiety; and aim to alter people's attachments to their environment and validate the need for relocation.

Spatial classifications have a powerful effect on how people connect with their environments. The label attached to coastal areas affected by storm surges during Yolanda had evolved throughout the different stages of post-disaster response and recovery. At first, the term “No Build Zone” was used, which was later recast as “No Dwelling Zone” to allow for commercial and tourism infrastructures to be built in risk-prone coastal areas (Yee, 2017). In 2014, a Joint Memorandum Circular⁸ was issued providing guidelines for adopting a “Hazard Zone” classification in Yolanda-affected areas (JMC No. 2014–01, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, et al., 2014). However, in my interviews with officials in Tacloban City, I noticed that the term “danger zone” was more widely employed.⁹ Not surprisingly, during my conversations with those relocated to the north, they continued to talk about their fear of storm surges, with the term “danger zone” imprinting itself into their everyday vocabulary. “After Yolanda, I had a difficult time sleeping while I was staying at the danger zone [before relocating], especially when it rained and the winds were strong. I still remember the water rising and sweeping away our home,” a disaster survivor told me.

Current analyses of the application of classifications such as No Build Zones or No Dwelling Zones focus on their political, economic, and territorial/legal implications (Fitzpatrick & Compton, 2017; Yee, 2017). However, not much attention is paid to how emotions engendered by the language used in such classifications serve to diminish or lend potency to state interventions and animate decisions regarding relocation. The prohibitive language of No Build or No Dwelling zones, for instance, renders the state susceptible to resistance as it elicited emotive responses that moved people to defend a place that they considered home. But by shifting the label to “danger zone,” the state impressed upon coastal residents the need to seek safety *for their own good*. After all, it was supposedly nature, and *not* the state, which caused their displacement. The term “danger” then activated emotions of fear and insecurity which bore upon people’s settlement decisions after the disaster.

Supporting danger zone classification is the production of hazard maps. A hazard map is a graphical representation of a hazard (or set of hazards) that affect a specific geographic area. Levels of risk are often represented through colors, usually with *high risk* areas highlighted in red. After Yolanda, the Philippine state had invested in re-assessing disaster risks of affected areas, specifically risks of storm surges, and in updating existing hazard maps. These maps have then been communicated through different means, for example, via the University of the Philippines NOAH website,¹⁰ and posters in public areas like the Tacloban City Hall and *barangay*¹¹ [village] centers.

The power of maps comes from the authority to define categories and boundaries of spaces, their respective utility, and consequently, the people and things allowed to inhabit these spaces. However, as Navaro-Yashin (2012) argues, documents (including maps) are not ideologically and emotively neutral objects but are in fact charged with affect and can have affective relationships with people. What effect could a hazard map, which depicts one’s home environment in bright red color, have on communities who only recently have survived a deluge? Drawing on recent trauma and continuing fear of another typhoon, hazard maps operate at both cognitive and affective levels by enabling people to visualize and thereby re-live emotions around what it means to reside in a “danger zone.”

To reinforce spatial classifications and hazard maps, storm-surge warning signs are posted across danger zones. The warning sign bears an illustration depicting a large wave about to sweep away a building, accompanied by the words: WARNING: STORM SURGE PRONE ZONE (see Figure 2.6). Having warning signs as a constant visual reminder of danger contributes to the creation of an atmosphere of insecurity and fear as they unequivocally drive home the point: *this is not a safe place to live in*. One of the women I interviewed, Marivic (33, married, mother of three), who had been relocated to the north said, “We really needed to move because, as you see [pointing to the photo of the warning sign], it is not a safe place ... I liked living there, but I am also afraid to go back.”

Risk-averse affective technologies, then, functioned to “fold in” people’s memories of trauma and devastating experiences of loss during Typhoon Yolanda into people’s “everyday socioecological relations” (Grove, 2014, p. 248).



Figure 2.6 Storm-surge warning sign next to the Anibong Shipwreck Memorial

As communities occupying the coastal areas were told of the *dangers* of staying where they were, the idea of moving to safer ground sounded both rational and appealing. However, producing risk-averse subjects only partially fulfils the objectives of benevolent discipline. To make citizens “resilient,” their aspirations must be molded toward specific visions and embodiments of a better post-Yolanda future.

Aspirational Affective Technologies

While risk-averse technologies reinscribed environments as sites of tragedy and potential future threat, aspirational technologies facilitated the investment of hope and desire in places, objects, and ways of being valued by the state. While many of these technologies abound, from the use of mass and social media, posters, political speeches, and so on, I draw attention to a set of mechanisms which I found to have had significant effects on resettled communities in Tacloban, especially in the context of their everyday practices of recovery. Specifically, I discuss how values formation and infrastructure, as among such apparatuses of governing, played a significant role in educating people’s values and aspirations.

To facilitate the transition to living in resettlement sites, housing “beneficiaries” had been required to undergo social preparation. Social preparation consisted of orientations regarding what to expect in the permanent resettlement sites and what rules beneficiaries must abide by in order to maintain

occupancy of awarded housing units. A fundamental element of social preparation is what officials referred to as a values formation program. Under this program, beneficiaries were required to attend a series of lecture-seminars which aimed to change their mindsets as they were taught how to be *better* neighbors, *better* parents, and ultimately *better* members of their resettled communities. Values formation programs emphasized maintaining amiable relationships and cooperation among neighbors, observing cleanliness of surroundings, and being able to comply with the rules and regulations of the new villages they would soon be calling home. As one study participant stated, “We were taught to leave our old selves behind ... we should not bring our negative attitudes and practices to our new communities.”

The programs were run with the presumption that housing beneficiaries, most of whom came from “squatter” communities, needed to be taught a particular ethic that emphasized responsibility for the *self* and the *community*. According to a city official:

When we go to the field, we focus on values formation. They [referring to “squatters”] have a different attitude. Very different. You will really have a hard time with them. I always say, it’s like taking care of a child. You can’t do it in a year. It requires a lifetime commitment.

“Squatters” had often been described in my interviews as lacking sanitary habits and social decorum which would make them unsuitable for life in the relocation sites. Thus, values formation aimed to instill an aspiration for – and to realign motivations toward – becoming good, responsible, (and hygienic) citizens in the newly reconstructed city.

Values formation initiatives were rolled out through government programs beyond initial social preparation, such as the Family Development Sessions (FDS), a monthly seminar for beneficiaries of the government’s conditional cash transfer programs called *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino*; the Modified Conditional Cash Transfer (MCCT),¹² and the community-based women’s sessions in resettlement areas. Usually, once beneficiaries had satisfied requirements of social preparation and had been assigned a housing unit, they were then obliged to sign a *Kasabutan* [agreement] that they would abide by the rules and emulate the values taught to them when they are transferred to the resettlement sites.¹³ In some resettlement sites, a symbolic ritual which included an “oath-taking” activity was conducted in order to impress upon housing beneficiaries the need to take to heart the values they had been taught as well as the obligations they needed to fulfill as members of the resettled community. Values formation as a disciplinary measure continued to play a significant role in the everyday life of resettled communities through their constant encounters with city officials, personnel, and state-organized Homeowners Associations which conducted rigorous occupancy surveillance on a day-to-day basis. I discuss this in more depth in Chapter 3, particularly in terms of how values formation functioned to direct particular emotions toward a desired life, on one hand, and against their previous life as “squatters,” on the other.

Infrastructure or, more broadly, the built environment, has the power to affect those who experience, encounter, and inhabit their spaces and can accordingly be used as a mechanism for control (Kraftl & Adey, 2008). The rapid construction of concrete, mainly commercial, infrastructure all over Tacloban City stirred feelings of pride and hope among study participants that indeed, Tacloban had recovered and become better. "What changes have you seen in Tacloban since Yolanda?" I asked one study participant, to which she replied, "There are many improvements now in Tacloban ... things we didn't have before. We now have wider roads, two Robinson's malls, Savemore and PureGold [supermarkets], and many more buildings and hotels. It's cleaner, *mas maupay na* [it's now better]." Seeing concrete infrastructure sprouting across Tacloban City led many study participants to state "*nag asenso na an Tacloban* [Tacloban has achieved progress]." Although they rarely accessed and encountered these sites of improvements as they were largely confined to resettlement sites located on the urban fringes of Tacloban (and establishments like hotels and department stores catered to a different class of clientele), witnessing the "concrete" transformations of Tacloban nonetheless evoked a sense of pleasure.

The power of (concrete) infrastructure to generate desires for modernity and progress is most demonstrated in the provision of *balay nga bato* [concrete houses] through housing projects offered by the government and other humanitarian agencies and private organizations to displaced families. *Balay nga bato* were presented as more resilient and typhoon-resistant than the informal structures that people were used to, thereby inscribing the discourse of safety into the built environment (Figure 2.7). However, beyond the notion of resilient dwelling, many participants admitted to having at first been excited to receive a *balay nga bato* in a "subdivision-style" settlement because for them it materialized a fantasy of living a modern lifestyle – "like living in Camella Homes."¹⁴ Prior to being resettled, they were allowed to tour the resettlement sites and view a model house. They were promised indoor plumbing, private toilets, individual electrical connection (amenities not usually available in informal settlements), as well as access to transportation.¹⁵

Hence, along with the development of aversive feelings toward informal housing structures (as dangerous and unruly) is the redirection of emotional attachments toward standardized *balay nga bato* laid out in an orderly and regimented manner. Although many of their expectations and aspirations regarding the housing projects would be unmet (more on this in Chapter 4), the provision of concrete houses had intimately woven together the discourse of safety, the narrative of the state's benevolence, and fantasies of modernity. As one official commented:

Many of these people have never lived in a house made of concrete. They have never even had houses of their own. They are very lucky to be provided houses by the government ... They should comply with the rules [for maintaining] occupancy and be thankful victims.



Figure 2.7 A view of Cawayanville, a resettlement site located in Barangay Cawayan, Tacloban North

Discipline as Situated in Subjective Dynamics

It might be tempting to conjure an image of the state that puts on affective displays and manipulates emotions in a very instrumental way to achieve its objectives or the vested interests of those who control the state. Political and economic interests of powerful politicians (and businesses) do play an important role in state decisions for reconstruction priorities and in reproducing class and other forms of inequalities (Gunewardena & Schuller, 2008; Klein, 2007; see Portiera, 2015 for examples in the Yolanda context), but I contend that the state, its processes and practices, cannot be reducible to such interests alone (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007). As pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, the state in this context is able to mobilize affect and emotions precisely because the state is also caught up in the subjective dynamics involved in the (re)production of state power. Expressions of concern for people's safety are not simply or necessarily insincere displays of affection intended solely for the purpose of control.

Indeed, as I engaged with state officials who oversaw, coordinated, and implemented different recovery and reconstruction programs in Tacloban, I noted how most of them expressed concern for the well-being of people, albeit in a paternalistic way. In one instance, I asked a barangay official regarding her thoughts on community relocation as part of the city's programs for

reconstruction and recovery. While she acknowledged that people were finding it difficult to adjust to the new resettlement sites they were being transferred to, she said:

Their conditions at the relocation sites are *nakakaawa* [pitiful]. It was better for them when they were still here [in their original community] ... but for me, I do not want harm to come to them ... I convinced them to relocate because I don't want [the disaster] to be repeated. I will be haunted by my conscience. So many people died.

In Tacloban, state agents speak of their role in reconstruction and recovery as a performance of their respective legal mandates. And yet, such performance is also emotionally laden. Many were not only officials, bureaucrats, front-line social workers, and managers; they also identified themselves as survivors of Yolanda. "We are victims too! *Na-Yolanda kami* [we were affected by Yolanda]," they would often exclaim. And because of that, they saw the enactment of their bureaucratic roles in relation to reconstruction and recovery as a *moral imperative* ("haunted by my conscience") to move people away from a perceived danger and consequently discipline them in order to build their "resilience."

Moreover, it is also important to note that while people had been subjected to disciplinary measures, it does not mean that they merely acquiesced to these. Governmental practices, after all, are never totalizing. Affect and emotions may augment the state's power, but these are not reducible to that power's effects. According to Anderson (2014, p. 16), affect is in "excess of the ways in which life and living are organised." Indeed, affective engagements between the state and urban poor communities have also resulted in frictions when aspirations, desires, and feelings of recovery do not resonate neatly with dominant prescriptions for "resilient" post-disaster futures.

Friction, a metaphor I appropriate and borrow from Tsing (2005), produces contingent and unpredictable movement, responses, and actions and constitutes the subjective dynamics through which benevolent discipline is enacted. Such contingency allows for generative moments that belie people's docility. In Tacloban, attempts to mobilize emotions of fear and to inculcate aspirations for resilient infrastructure, for example, have not constantly generated the responses expected and therefore indicate the affective frictions underlying these engagements. As I will demonstrate in Chapters 4 and 5, women in many ways qualify, reappropriate, and contest efforts to discipline them into resilience.

Conclusion

Emotions, as Roberto Barrios (2017, p. 3) noted, *are all over disasters*. Yet, affect and emotions are often considered epiphenomenal to understanding processes of rebuilding and recovery. This chapter has demonstrated not only how emotions are evoked in post-disaster contexts, but also how these are mobilized as a means of governing. By focusing on the state as an affective social subject

rather than as an emotively neutral and rational institution, I drew attention to a novel mode of governing which I call benevolent discipline. An analysis of how the city government of Tacloban enacts benevolent discipline reveals how *Building Back Better* is not only a prescription for reconstruction and resilient post-disaster development but is also an affectively charged moral endeavor.

The workings of the “benevolent” state became apparent in a number of ways. First, by employing the discourse of safety, the state was able to frame directions and plans for reconstruction as a performance of altruism – ultimately guided by the imperative to save the lives of the “vulnerable”. In doing so, it attempted to draw positive affective investments toward itself in order to legitimize its visions and actions toward recovery. Moreover, by targeting and intervening on affective life – appealing to emotions of fear and trauma, on one hand, and inculcating desires for a better future – through a range of affective technologies, the state was able to dramatically reconfigure socio-ecological relations. With benevolent discipline as a form of affective-discursive regime that characterized post-Yolanda reconstruction in Tacloban, I highlight how the state has set particular ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving within the newly reconstructed social and moral order.

As a fundamentally moral endeavor, benevolent discipline prescribes a particular ethical formation that privileges the creation of active agents responsible for their own survival (or resilience). This kind of moral engineering that arises out of the state’s affective-discursive practices and is shaped by global frameworks around risk management and planning logics, however, has not necessarily meshed seamlessly with the lived realities of displaced communities. In Chapter 3, I focus on how such mode of governing operates at the micro-moral domains of everyday life in disaster resettlement. Through women’s narratives, I reveal how resilience practices in Tacloban instrumentalize women’s affective labors and care-based practices in the service of state aspirations for recovery.

Acknowledgment

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Notes

- 1 In the Philippines, the political organization is characterized as a presidential system with a centralized national government. However, local governments play a primary role in directing local development, planning, infrastructure, and service delivery, as enshrined in the Local Government Code of 1991. In disaster risk reduction and management, the central role of the local government is affirmed through the Philippine Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act of 2010.

- 2 Entrenchment of state power in local politics is an attribute of Philippine political organization and relations (Abinales & Amoroso, 2017). Political culture is often described as operating through kin-based ties, (inter)personal relationships, patronage, and clientelism (Bulloch, 2018; Hutchcroft, 1991; 1994) – although certainly not reducible to these (see Kerkvliet, 1995; Quimpo, 2008; Sidel, 1999).
- 3 The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (PHIVOLCS) is a service institute under the Philippine Government's Department of Science and Technology. It provides information and warning services related to volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, earthquakes, and related hazards. The Mines and Geosciences Bureau of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources conducts geohazard assessments among its functions and mandates.
- 4 Anticipatory logics are reasonings that pre-empt potentialities of future harm that are derived from threats such as environmental hazards (see Anderson, 2010; Grove, 2014).
- 5 Although considered a highly derogatory term, the use of "squatter" has been notably pervasive in interviews with officials as well as with disaster survivors.
- 6 Tacloban City is hailed as the home city of Imelda Romualdez Marcos, wife of ousted dictator Ferdinand Marcos. In 1978, Imelda Marcos was appointed as Minister of Human Settlements, a powerful ministry which provided the strategic direction for urban development on a national scale. During the Marcos regime, informal settlements were treated as "enemies of the state," as eyesores of the *Bagong Lipunan* [New Society] that the dictatorship aimed to build (Shatkin, 2004).
- 7 This does not mean that there was no resistance at all to the planned relocation of coastal communities. Such resistance was demonstrated and articulated, especially in the early stages of disaster response when the state had issued an order declaring coastal areas as "No Build Zones," disallowing displaced communities from returning to their original places of habitation and accessing relief and assistance (see Curato et al., 2016; Yee, 2017). While communities which have been relocated have voiced their dissatisfaction with conditions in resettlement sites at the time of writing, the discourse of safety pervades as a strong justification for relocation and remains hegemonic.
- 8 This was issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Department of Interior and Local Government, Department of Public Works and Highways, and the Department of Science and Technology.
- 9 The term "danger areas" is officially used under the Urban Development and Housing Act of the Philippines of 1992 which states that evictions and demolitions are justified when settlements or houses are located along waterways, railways, and other hazard-prone environments.
- 10 UP-NOAH is a research center at the University of the Philippines National Institute of Geological Sciences which assists government and other stakeholders in disaster risk reduction, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and other related programs and initiatives.
- 11 The *barangay* is the smallest political unit in the Philippines. As a form of local government under the city government, it is administered by a set of elected officials headed by a Barangay Captain.
- 12 The Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) is the flagship poverty reduction initiative of the Philippine government which provides a monthly cash grant to the poorest members of Philippine society on a set of conditions – that children are sent to school and are provided up-to-date immunizations, and that beneficiaries attend a monthly Family Development Session, among others. The Modified Conditional Cash Transfer Program is a variant of the 4Ps aimed at providing cash grants with the same set of conditionalities to families living on the streets, mobile Indigenous people, as well as families affected by disasters.
- 13 While this is the formal process for resettlement, this was not always followed especially when President Rodrigo Duterte, upon assuming the presidency in 2016,

- gave a directive to fast-track the awarding of housing units. Values formation had to be conducted through other means than social preparation.
- 14 Camella Homes is the largest house and lot developer in the Philippines. Catering to mainly middle-class families, Camella Homes has come to symbolize modern-style living in people's urban imaginary.
 - 15 During my fieldwork, most resettlement sites did not have running water and heavily depended on water delivered by the city government on specific days in a week. Some sites also did not have electricity.

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3 Governing Through Women

Gendered Governance of Communities

Nelia, an active officer of a Homeowners Association (HOA) at one of the resettlement sites I studied, was showing me some of the certificates she had accumulated through attending trainings, workshops, and seminars organized by the city government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other humanitarian aid organizations after Yolanda. “I like collecting certificates,” she told me, “it makes me feel proud that I have accomplished something and that I am a person entrusted to be a leader in our community.” Janet, Nelia’s friend who was with us that afternoon, laughed and remarked, “If there’s a training, meeting, or workshop, nothing will stop Nelia from attending. Not a medical emergency, not even Yolanda!”

Janet and Nelia formed their friendship through participation in their respective HOAs newly formed in various resettlement villages in Tacloban North. Both were also single mothers in their thirties who juggled the responsibilities of being primary carers for their young children as well as discharging their duties as officers of the association. They met during the workshops and seminars, organized by the City Housing and Community Development Office and the City Social Welfare and Development Office. These brought together many other women from the different resettlement sites. The creation, capacity development, and continuous mentoring of community organizations had been a primary undertaking of the Tacloban City Government. Speaking of her experience as a community leader, Nelia commented:

It’s very challenging and exhausting work. Not all the time people will like you for what you do ... But we are living in one community. Why would you even live in a community if you don’t participate? Do you just eat, sleep, and leave whenever you like? How can you call yourself a member and not share in the responsibility? *Kailangang makialam* [We have to be involved]!

These accounts foreground the notions of community-building and participation and their apparent importance in periods of disaster recovery – the roles of which have often been explored and positively evaluated in studies of post-disaster situations (Maly, 2017; Mannakkara & Wilkinson, 2014; Sadiqi et al.,

2016; Vallance & Carlton, 2015). Here, values of participation, belongingness, and mutual support are valorized and sutured together as key conditions for enabling newly “rebuilt” communities to thrive. Indeed, this communitarian thinking about recovery and resilience to existing and future risks resonates well with cultural narratives in the Philippines that highlight the necessity of community-based relations, actions, and adaptations in dealing with environmental hazards (Bankoff, 2003; 2007). In recent experiences, especially during the Yolanda response, such communitarian narratives embodied by the notion of *bayanihan* [voluntary mutual assistance]¹ have been increasingly appropriated and employed by disaster aid organizations and government institutions to foster forms of civic engagements and behaviors meant to engender long-term recovery (Su & Mangada, 2016).

In this chapter, however, I appreciate the notion of community and its role in recovery differently. Without negating the merits of community-based or people-centered approaches in disaster recovery and their creative and transformative potentials (Aldrich, 2015; Maly, 2017; Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004; Pyles, 2007; Schilderman & Lyons, 2011), I re-evaluate the notion of “community” in terms of the role it plays within current modes of post-disaster governance, as discussed in Chapter 2. Taking off from the conversation with Nelia above, I highlight how community is instrumentalized (Li, 2006; 2011) and becomes a vital element of particular ways of governing – upon which much of the success of advancing the aspirations and programs of government rest (Rose, 2000a) – and the pivotal roles that women have played within these local assemblages of governing relations. In this sense, community, and the women who are mobilized to shape it, are regarded as the means for the exercise of political power in fulfillment of specific desires and approved pathways for recovery and reconstruction.

Nelia’s statements above also reveal how moral and affective attachments to the notion of “taking responsibility” had shaped her own subjectivity as a member of her new community. As a responsible member of the community, accordingly, one must exhibit *pakikialam* [becoming involved]² and undertake or aspire for continuous improvements of the self (through trainings, seminars, and workshops) under the “benevolent” tutelage of the state and NGO workers and other technical experts working with the state in disaster recovery. While Chapter 2 focused on how the state mobilized affect, discourse, and ethics in the socio-ecological, affective, and moral re-ordering of Tacloban City, I show here that the inculcation of the ethic of responsibility through the enactment of benevolent discipline most evidently plays out within the micro-moral domains of everyday life: the community, home, and the body. As these domains through which post-disaster rebuilding and governance operate are also fundamentally feminized spaces (Harcourt & Escobar, 2002; Harris, 2015), I argue that governing the post-disaster city of Tacloban has been largely carried out by governing through women.

I construct the concept of *governing through women* not simply to refer to the involvement of women in reconstruction and recovery processes. Rather, it is derived from the ideas of social theorist Nikolas Rose, who links the notion of “community” to the ways in which subjects of government in modern times

are collectivized and made intelligible in order to harness “active practices of self-management and identity construction, of personal ethics and collective allegiances” (Rose, 1999, p. 176). Here, communities are construed as self-generating formations which take responsibility for their own improvement (Li, 2006) – with the state as an enabler of self-governing capacities rather than as the primary bearer of such responsibilities. Communities, then, are not simply a “territory of government” but, in fact, a *means* of governing (Rose, 1996). He calls this distinctive technique of government *governing through community* (Rose, 1999; 2000a; Rose & Lentzos, 2017). Linking this to feminist literature on the “feminization of responsibility and/or obligation” (Bradshaw, 2014; Chant, 2008; 2014), I argue that governing through community in the context of Tacloban’s reconstruction and management of resettlement communities is a decidedly gendered process. As such, it is highly contingent on, fundamentally structured around, and intimately tied to women’s physical and affective labors and practices of care. Thus, what may be regarded as governing through community is in effect governing through women.

This chapter demonstrates how governing through women has become a feature of Tacloban’s post-disaster governance in its attempts to Build Back Better. Women’s participation, organizing, and self-enhancement programs weave together individual responsibility, community-building, and ethical citizenship in pursuit of particular interpretations of (resilient) recovery.

The targeting and mobilization of women as participant-beneficiaries of reconstruction projects, especially in the Global South, have produced a prevalent but often unacknowledged phenomenon: the feminization of responsibility in community recovery (Alburo-Cañete, 2024; Bradshaw, 2014; Bradshaw & Linneker, 2009). This feminization of responsibility, I argue, forms the backbone of government at the community level. Here, I employ the term “government” not simply to refer to the state apparatus (e.g., local or national government) but rather to the “attempt to shape human conduct by calculated means” (Li, 2007, p. 275; see also Foucault, 1991). If benevolent discipline works on shaping people’s capacities and desires through the state’s affective-discursive practices, with the end goal of shaping governable (and self-governing) subjects of the new resilient city, governing through women becomes the main mechanism for applying the techniques of responsible self-government and moral development at the scale of everyday life in resettlement communities.

Responsible Women

It’s difficult, if you really think about it. Sometimes I tell myself it might have been better if I were a man who had a wife. If you’re a man, all you think about is earning a living. Meanwhile, it is the woman who has to carry a child for nine months, care for children until they’re grown, do housework over and over again, take care of everything ... after Yolanda, I find myself doing even more things.

(Annie, 24, married, mother of two)



Figure 3.1 Two women pushing a cart bearing construction materials at a resettlement site

The concept of “feminization of responsibility and/or obligation” is largely attributed to the work of feminist scholar Sylvia Chant (2006; 2008; 2014). Based on her comparative ethnographic research in the Gambia, the Philippines, and Costa Rica, Chant poses a critique of trends in international development which cast women as an “untapped resource” and target investments toward increasing women’s participation as part of anti-poverty initiatives (Narayan, 2010). While participation in such programs, most notably conditional cash transfers and microfinance schemes, might not always be detrimental, Chant points out how such interventions have largely led to the intensification of women’s productive and reproductive work (Chant, 2014; see also Cookson, 2018). These “women empowerment” and anti-poverty projects, accordingly, demand more time and labor from women to contribute to household income, while men do not face the same expectations for diversification of labor – most particularly in relation to care work. Thus, women are left “without any discernible increase in rewards or entitlements” (Chant, 2008, p. 176) – only an increase in responsibilities.

In the last couple of decades, women have figured more visibly as participant-beneficiaries of various interventions and projects (Bradshaw, 2001; 2013; 2014). Women have increasingly been identified as recipients of aid and livelihood recovery programs, and involved directly in various post-disaster initiatives, including housing reconstruction. Their contributions are often hailed as

testaments to women's empowerment, and to their usefulness in confronting the challenges after disaster. Their knowledge, experiences, and social networks make them valuable participants of reconstruction.

Resonating with Chant's arguments above, Bradshaw (2014) notes how women's roles and responsibilities in disaster recovery have expanded without necessarily producing substantial benefits to women's status or ability to claim their rights in the household or in the community. While women indeed built houses, for example, restrictions on land and property rights, in some contexts, still precluded women from claiming entitlements over the houses they themselves had built (Bradshaw, 2013). Likewise, women's participation in post-disaster cash-for-work programs did not necessarily translate to better bargaining power within the household, despite their contributions to sustaining the family. Thus, women's inclusion in disaster recovery and reconstruction programs could be seen as more oriented toward *efficiency* rather than *empowerment* (Bradshaw, 2014; see also Harris, 2009; Morales & Harris, 2014), and runs the risk of once again perpetuating the feminization of responsibility characterizing conventional anti-poverty programs.

The insights from the feminization of responsibility literature are valuable in understanding the role of women in disaster recovery and the associated costs: time, energy, and emotions. Beyond this, however, I underscore the importance of recognizing the ways in which this feminization of responsibility is implicated in a wider but intimately encountered system of post-disaster governance. While women have been cast as efficient means to deliver resources to households in times of disasters (see Reyes & Lu, 2016, for an example from the Philippines), their roles in the governance of recovery projects and endeavors are much greater, more complex, and much more pivotal – but also less examined.

The notion of governing through women not only supports the salient arguments of the literature on the feminization of responsibility but also expands the analyses to encompass an understanding of how governing everyday life after disaster is practically moored on women's socially ascribed responsibilities to home and community. In much of the literature on gender and climate change, for instance, women's "virtuousness" is often highlighted as an opportunity to bring about effective outcomes in managing and reducing risks of disasters. Women are seen to be "more sensitive to risk, more prepared for behavioural change, and more likely to support drastic policies and measures" on climate change and disasters (Arora-Jonsson, 2011, p. 745). This perceived willingness for attitudinal change, coupled with expectations for responsibility, constitutes a logic that presents women as vehicles for governing.

I speak of women's responsibilities in two different but interrelated senses – as both *ethical* and *technical* (following Rose & Lentzos 2017). As an *ethic* – that is, as a value and a set of values to live by – women's responsibilities are constructed around culturally specific accounts of female altruism and "women's morality" (see Tronto, 1993) that associate care-based practices, forms of emotional labor, and reproductive work with women's roles in sustaining community life. As a *technical* achievement, such ethic of responsibility is regarded as something that

can be cultivated, enhanced, and attained through a range of interventions – often carried out under the guidance of those who know “better.” In other words, responsibility, as with resilience, is regarded as something that can be *taught* (Rose & Lentzos, 2017).

In the reconstruction context of Tacloban, I illuminate how governing through women, which I define as *a set of governmental practices that instrumentalize women's labors and participation as part of attempts to produce self-governing and governable communities*, activates these ethical and technical dimensions of “women's responsibilities.” I examine how the post-Yolanda recovery initiatives of the state have animated and harnessed norms of female altruism and women's moral obligations to care in pursuit of goals for reconstruction. Then, I highlight how Tacloban's (feminized) project of “ethical citizenship” involved three processes of subjectification (Foucault, 1982) in the production of “responsible women.” The first process is what study participants have referred to as “discarding the old self” (*iwanan ang dating sarili*) – signaling an openness to imbibe the values of the new urban citizen in post-disaster Tacloban. Second is the process of “enhancing the new self” through the inculcation of skills, mindsets, moral orientations, and aspirations based heavily on gendered constructs of Filipino femininity and motherhood. The third process involved the activation of collective allegiances for (re)shaping community life. Here we see the specific modulation of the moral-psychological sentiment of *pakikialam* – of getting oneself involved in the affairs of others – which actuates women as responsible citizens who drive the re-construction, improvement, and – to a large extent – management of resettlement communities.

As a caveat, however, I need to stress here that while these processes contribute to producing the subjects of post-disaster development (i.e., “responsible” citizens of the resilient city), such processes do not determine women's subjectivities and actions. They do, however, form part of governance mechanisms which, while influential, are not absolute in their effects. I indicate some of these frictions that arise as women are subjected to these governmental practices toward the end of the chapter and engage with them more directly in the succeeding chapters.

Ilaw Ng Tahanan

It is the woman who has many obligations at home ... for me, the family will be better cared for if the woman is responsible. Because the men, they just go with the flow. Even if men are the leaders, the pillar of the home, nothing will happen [for the family] if women do not act.

(Liza, 28, married, mother of two)

In the Philippines, traditional gender ideology is often expressed through the heteronormative constructions of men/fathers as the *haligi ng tahanan* [pillar of the home] while women/mothers are regarded as *ilaw ng tahanan* [light of the home]. Men are the reliable providers and women are the nurturers, performing



Figure 3.2 A woman washes clothes outside her home at a resettlement site

altruistic behaviors in order to ensure the family's well-being. While the depiction of women as *ilaw ng tabanan* may superficially carry positive connotations, women's care work in the Philippine context (and beyond) is still largely essentialized as women's natural roles and evidently devalued in relation to masculinized "productive" work (Brickell & Chant, 2010; Chant & McIlwaine, 1995; Parreñas, 2008). While these gender constructions – and contestations to such – have been well explored in the vibrant field of gender and development studies on and within the Philippines (Angeles, 2002; Brickell & Chant, 2010; Estudillo et al., 2001; Godquin & Quisumbing, 2008; Roces, 1998; Sobritchea, 2005), I draw attention to how norms of female altruism which undergird understandings of women/mothers as the *ilaw ng tabanan* have been mobilized to facilitate household and community recovery in the aftermath of Yolanda in Tacloban (see Tanyag, 2018).

During one of my visits to Cawayanville, a resettlement site in Tacloban North, I was invited to attend a "women's session" organized by the City Social Welfare and Development Office, which is basically a one-hour seminar held twice a month, covering a range of topics aimed at "enhancing women's skills and knowledge." While waiting for participants to arrive at the Women-Friendly Space (WFS), a single-storey building established by the UNFPA, I talked with a social worker who was providing a lecture on the topic of time management that day. At one point, I asked her why they primarily targeted

women in their activities. She told me how women were very important in helping communities adjust to living in their new villages. Women, she said, had been “very active” in various recovery programs and activities of the city government, and their office was committed to further “empowering” these women. She later stated:

Women have played a big role after Yolanda because they are the ones who look after the family, right? They look after the children, they also make sure that the family recovers [from disaster]. If there is no mother, what will happen to the family? Because mothers prioritize family. Especially in availing of housing assistance.

From this conversation, it becomes apparent how the means for achieving recovery and empowerment through such community-based programs are intimately entangled with and propelled by assumptions regarding women's roles and obligations. By invoking specific constructions of gender and motherhood (as prioritizing family), the centrality of expectations for female altruism especially in times of disaster is underscored (Smyth & Sweetman, 2015).

In Tacloban, both women and men participated actively in post-Yolanda interventions and mutual aid initiatives to deliver services and relief to affected communities. This included participation in cash-for-work or food-for-work schemes, and acts of *bayanihan* [voluntary mutual assistance], wherein women and men took part in debris clearing, cleanliness drives, and rebuilding or constructing houses through housing projects. However, the women performed to a great(er) extent the role of providing care that significantly impacted on the ability of families to survive and thrive. Nelia, 37, single parent of three, shared her struggles with caring for her small children and an ailing father immediately after Yolanda:

Our home was in San Jose [one of the areas most affected by the storm surges]. We were totally washed out³ after Yolanda. We cried, seeing that there was nothing left but the concrete floor of our old house. It was difficult. [Along with my mother], I looked after my father who was paralyzed [he died less than a year later]), and my small children. We lived for many months in a tent with two other families. I did my best to find money and food so we could survive. I signed up for anything that could keep us alive ... but of course, when you're with two other families, you don't just buy food for yourself. You share what you have ... I thought, as long as my children have enough to eat, I can eat just once a day. *Syempre, kung nanay ka, sasakit ang dibdib mong makitang walang makain ang mga anak mo. Ok lang akong magutom, wag lang sila.* [Of course, if you are a mother, your heart will ache seeing your children without anything to eat. I am fine with being hungry, as long as they don't go hungry.]

Anita, 30, also recounted her experience of having to care for a child with disability at this time:

My son has a disability. Until now he is unable to care for himself [at 9 years of age], all grown but still like a baby, he can't even walk. I cannot work because no one else can look after him. His condition got much worse with Yolanda. He was having seizures often because of the trauma. He was so distressed because we got caught in the rising waters ... it was a miracle we survived [him, me, and my nine-month-old baby]. After Yolanda, there was no medicine available for him, and we didn't have any money to buy the medicine [to manage his condition] ... things became more difficult for us after Yolanda. I had to look after both him and my baby ... at the same time worrying where we will get food to keep us alive.

Affective labor and care work (Brickell & Chant, 2010, p. 151) were performed as women consoled the family, kept up hope in the midst of crisis, nurtured dependent household members, and ensured access to food and water (see also Reyes & Lu, 2016). With the erosion of vital infrastructure and basic services such as health and sanitation in the early months after the disaster, the demand for unpaid care labor increased exponentially. As demonstrated in the narratives of Nelia, Anita, and others, women filled the gaps in service delivery and family welfare support that formal institutions could not offer (see also Floro & Poyatzis, 2019).

Ensuring family survival also meant seeking opportunities to secure resources for the household. As Nelia narrated, she “signed up for anything” so that the needs of her family – as well as of other families they were sharing a tent space with – would be met. Various schemes for assistance, relief, and rebuilding opened such spaces for women’s participation in recovery initiatives. “Men also participated in the assistance programs,” said Annie, 24, “but most of us who worked in these programs were women ... because men are busy with earning a living. We cannot expect them to participate and leave behind their work.” Elena, 43, also told me, “I queued for relief distributions, cleared debris, and worked hard to get assistance for my family.” And although Elena was not officially recognized as the “primary beneficiary” of aid (a designation often given to male heads of households), she said that within their household, she had participated most in post-disaster programs rolled out by government and other non-government and humanitarian organizations. “It doesn’t matter that I am not acknowledged as the beneficiary ... as long as I can make sure that my family can receive aid and relief, that is all that matters,” said Elena.

A main driver for women’s labors in disaster recovery are culturally embedded notions of women’s responsibility and obligation to care; thus, the women sought out and participated in various recovery programs so resources and other benefits would go to the household. Meanwhile, men’s commitments to family life are understood principally in terms of earning income. While a

number of women I interviewed did in fact engage in paid work or earned income, the obligation to care for family members still fell disproportionately on their shoulders. Indeed, one high-ranking official I interviewed said, “Women are actually more resilient than men [because they are able to do so many things]. Without them, Tacloban would not have recovered the way that it has.”

While the pervasive discourse regarding disaster recovery and resilience tends to romanticize the role of community solidarity and mutual aid (Su & Mangada, 2016), what is often left unsaid is the extent to which such communitarian solutions to the challenges of rebuilding rely on harnessing norms of female altruism and women’s responsibilities (Smyth & Sweetman, 2015; Tanyag, 2018). I argue here that women’s care labors in disaster recovery occupy a central role in the actual implementation and management of post-Yolanda resettlement and community rebuilding, although such labors are largely unrecognized in official guidelines, policies, and frameworks employed in the reconstruction of Tacloban (e.g., City Government of Tacloban, 2014; NEDA, 2013; OPARR, 2014). Such labors have not eluded the gaze of the state but have been appropriated as a fundamental, albeit informal element, of current organized practices of producing and governing post-disaster communities. In what follows, I detail how such gendered labors become instrumentalized through three interrelated processes: (1) discarding the old self; (2) enhancing the new self; and (3) activating collective allegiances.

“We Are a Village Now”: Discarding the Old Self

For me, if you call something a “village,” it is something beautiful, something with class. Not a community which is *kalat-kalat* [messy] ... like a chaotic market ... we need to do our part to make sure that [here] we no longer live like squatters.

(Nelia, 37, single mother of three)

A study participant made a striking remark regarding new life in the resettlement villages. “We are a village now,” she said. “Everything we were, everything that wasn’t good, we should leave behind ... We can’t live in a village and still live like squatters.” This was a reaction to images of resettlement villages which showcased paved roads and brightly painted concrete row houses (Figure 3.3). The term “village” here is employed in a specific way. Juxtaposed to the idea of living like “squatters,” to live in a village denoted an upgrade not just of living conditions but also most significantly of social status. Interestingly, this sentiment also resonated among a number of women I had engaged with in my study. “Village,” or alternately “subdivision,”⁴ is not simply understood as a residential area. The terms represent a brand of urban class politics which is inscribed in the production and use of space and has become more apparent in the reconstruction of Tacloban (see Lefebvre, 1991; Low, 2001; Low & Lawrence-Zuniga, 2003). Concrete infrastructure and regimented housing which are often characteristic of middle-class gated communities in the Philippines and



Figure 3.3 A resettlement village made of concrete and standardized houses

elsewhere (Kleibert, 2018; Roitman & Recio, 2019), and which in some ways have now become a feature of resettlement villages, palpably generated a desire to become more “modern” – and to shape actions, attitudes, feelings, and moral inclinations accordingly. To achieve this desire, as participants expressed, required shedding what was deemed unfit for this new way of life – a discarding of the old self.

As discussed in Chapter 2, affective-discursive practices of the state served to alter people’s relationships with their environments and ways of life. One such intended outcome of these state practices was the development of aversive feelings toward being “squatters.” As a squatter, one’s personal ethics and habits are regarded as incompatible with the brand of citizenship envisioned for the post-disaster city. Thus, resettlement programs and recovery initiatives sought to correct the squatter mentality – characterized by the proclivity for messiness, vice, unproductivity, and indolence – which supposedly plagued urban poor informal settlers.

With the disaster regarded as an opportunity for change, officials, experts, and planners imagined reconstruction as building on a clean slate – physically, spatially, and most of all, socially. In the state-run resettlement program (both contractor-driven and donor-partnered), “changing the people” and eventually the process of discarding the self began with the disintegration of pre-existing community ties. Upon seeing Figure 3.4, Marivic, 33, shared her story:



Figure 3.4 One of the resettlement communities managed by the National Housing Authority in Tacloban North

I used to live in a compound with my parents and my siblings, and my cousins were just nearby. Admittedly, we fought with each other sometimes. That's not something we can avoid even if we are family. We didn't have a concrete house like this one [gesturing to her house where the interview took place] but I liked staying there [in our previous house]. We could run to each other for things we needed. One would say, "Do you have some salt?" and I would say, "Yes, I do. Come have some." ... When we were being relocated, *pinaghiwa-hiwalay kami* [we were all separated]. Our *barangay* [community] before, it is no longer whole. Some of my neighbors have been assigned to one resettlement village, while others were sent to another. We have no choice. They have a system of deciding who gets to live where ... *pinaghiwa-hiwalay kami*.

Within the literature on Filipino psychology, the cultural constructions of the "self" is articulated in terms of relationship with others. The idea of *kapwa* (described as a sense of "shared self" or being "together-with-the-person") is considered a core Filipino social value (Enriquez, 1978; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Reyes, 2015). In order to embody *kapwa* (closely related to the notion of *kaupod* and *igkasi tawo* in the Waray language), one must be able to demonstrate *pakikiramdam*, which refers to the act of feeling for another, a

“desirable skill in many situations involving Filipino social interaction” that is developed and sustained through a sense of belonging to community and place (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000, p. 57). In the context of resettlement, the disintegration of communities and their physical relocation may be seen as part of the process of re-making the self. By displacing the affective and moral relations within communities that formed the basis of *kapwa*, the city’s resettlement program sought to redefine that sense of community and redirect attachments by creating new communities founded on specific moral standards. Thus, abandoning the old self would mean not only changing attitudes and mindsets, as officials have often emphasized, but also altering or even severing place-based social relations.

Informal settlers affected by Yolanda were placed initially in shelters called “bunkhouses” where they found themselves living next to strangers. Living standards were considered dire because of lack of access to water and sanitation, lack of privacy, and infestation of insects and rodents, among other things (see also Compton, 2018). Furthermore, they constantly mentioned being “separated” or “scattered” (*pinaghiwa-hiwalay*), being “alone” (*nag-iisa*) and “insecure” (*diri kampakante*), as part of their hardships during the resettlement process.

Living in the bunkhouses was like a rite of passage;⁵ undergoing an ordeal in order to achieve renewal. Participants were saying “*naghirap kami para makarating dito* [we went through hardship in order to get to where we are]” (Liza, 28, married mother of two), “*tiniis namin para makamit ang pabahay* [we endured it so we could acquire a house]” (Marivic, 33), “*hirap muna bago happy-happy* [hardship first before finding enjoyment]” (Annie, 24) and “*naghirap para baguhin ang ugali* [we labored in order to reform ourselves]” (Nelia, 37). And indeed, it was in this transitional stage toward permanent relocation where the state carried out its project of moral reformation.

“Values formation,” a core citizenship-building intervention embedded in the city government’s resettlement program, was the main mechanism for redirecting motivations and aspirations for disaster recovery and eventually, for crafting the ideal citizen by fixing defective elements of family and community relations. The Values Formation program (discussed in Chapter 2 as an affective technology of recovery) required representatives from displaced families to attend a series of seminars and activities that emphasized the need to change habits, mindsets, and personalities in order to be deemed suitable for relocation. Vangie, 54, shared her experience of participating in values formation:

We conducted values [formation]. Every building in the bunkhouse [settlement] had values formation. We did it every Saturday and Sunday. If you cannot attend ... well, these are the rules. You have to follow, otherwise you won’t be given a house. If you are hard-headed, you won’t have a house. We needed to change our ways because we are required to be more formal and well-mannered in [the resettlement village] ... you should not gossip, you should not be drinking, you should not fight with your neighbors ... That’s what we talk about during values [formation]. They said, do not bring with you your ‘squatter’ ways to the village.

Nelia, in particular, viewed values formation as important in preparing herself for living in her new community:

If you come from the bunkhouses, *doon pinoporma ang ugali mo* [your character is being shaped there]. *Dapat daw iwan ang dating ugali* [we were told to leave behind our old ways]. We have values formation. City Housing personnel came to remind us over and over again what we need to become when we live in permanent housing. So already, we were trained. We can't just hang out our clothes to dry in front of our houses [for example]. *Na-internalize ko na lahat yun* [I internalized all that]. So, it wasn't difficult for me to adjust when I came to the resettlement. I had already prepared myself and I knew what was expected of me.

These quotes show values formation as an initial step toward self-governing communities, carried out to generate affective ties to a particular notion of a good (or "better") citizen – morally upright, responsible, and well-mannered – and to simultaneously create negative feelings toward the idea of "who they used to be." In this sense, values formation constituted a form of *ethical reconstruction* which attempted to purge people of undesirable qualities on one hand, and to inculcate values and sentiments which would somehow re-attach them to a now "virtuous community," on the other (see Rose, 2000a). A *balay nga bato* [concrete house] in a brand new village in a safe area was a prize awaiting them at the end of their ordeals.

Many study participants said they attended values formation mainly to comply with requirements of the state's housing project, but it soon became apparent how the particular affective-discursive regime had some influence on their subjective dispositions. One very notable part of the PhotoKwento interview involved an image of a back portion of a cluster of houses in a state-run resettlement site. A great majority of participants reacted strongly and almost immediately to the photo which featured a leashed dog, muddy unpaved alleyway, chickens, and clothes hung out to dry (Figure 3.5).

They showed common adverse reactions in body language, like frowning and grimacing, and used the following words to describe the image: *magulo*, *kalat-kalat*, or *nakakasamok* [messy, chaotic], *marumi* [dirty], *pangit* or *maraksot* [ugly, unsightly], *nakakasakit* [disease-ridden], *parang iskwater* [like squatters], *bawal* [prohibited]. Although the photograph was taken at a resettlement site, study participants said that it reminded them of their surroundings when they were squatters. A good number of them invoked "the rules" and what is *bawal*, such as Liza below:

These people, they made extensions. Those are not allowed (*bawal*) under the rules. You shouldn't have dogs there, or chickens. They are dirty, they disturb the neighbors. It's very messy (*nakakasamok*). This back portion is not beautifully done, look at that – the clothes are just hung out like that. *Parang iskwater din tingnan* [it still looks like a squatter community].



Figure 3.5 Back portion of houses in a state-run resettlement site

Curiously, when participants talked about what they missed from their previous communities, many said they missed raising their own livestock, having pets, living without strict prohibitions, and living in their old home by the sea. But when confronted with this image, they displayed feelings of disgust over the perceived messiness and dirtiness of squatter-like conditions represented.

Disgust here is not simply experienced as revulsion toward something “dirty” – as objects considered “dirty” or “repulsive,” according to anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966), are arbitrary and culturally defined. Disgust directed toward any association with squatter conditions and the squatter identity, therefore, is a response with physiological, emotional, and moral qualities resulting from the “social agreements in operation that drive disgust reactions” (Tyler, 2013, p. 23). In this regard, the circulation of disgust and contempt toward who people “used to be” – through values formation – is evidently a mechanism of governance which is crucial to shaping good citizens. Internalization of social judgments and stigmatization of former identities as “squatters” are hence expressed as self-shame and self-denouncement.

Indeed, many of the participants quickly adopted the language of resettlement program managers: people going against the rules were “violators,” “*pasaway*” [troublesome], “*delinkwente*” [delinquents], “*matigas ang ulo*” [hard-headed], and “*ugaling iskwater*” [with squatter behavior/mentality] – and they needed constant discipline to stay in the village. As Lina, 35, a single parent of two, said, “*Damo nga bawal. Kulang na lang bawal huminga* [there are so many prohibitions, what is missing is that they ban breathing too]! But I guess it’s OK. The rules are there to help discipline us.” Participants who admitted to some of the prohibited or *bawal* practices provided justifications but eventually reverted to the idea of “leaving behind” their old ways:

Here at our place, we have a dog, but it is on a leash. We don’t let it go around the village so we won’t get into trouble with our neighbors. Sometimes dogs are useful to ward away thieves ... In the village, *damo nga bawal* [there are many prohibitions]. Cats are *bawal*, chickens are *bawal*, keeping birds is *bawal* ... a lot of things are *bawal*, only people are allowed here (laughs) ... but this is OK, there is discipline. I think it’s good because people won’t be doing the kind of things they used to do before. Bad things. Fighting, gossiping, and going around shirtless [in public]. It’s shameful.

(Maria, 36, married mother of five)

Beneficiaries who were deemed ready to move on to permanent resettlement signed the *Kasabutan* [agreement], a contract that inscribed their commitment to become “new persons” and shun squatter practices. For example, gambling and “hanging out” or *pagtatambay* outside their houses (particularly, engaged in drinking alcoholic beverages) were prohibited under the *Kasabutan*, not only because these activities were seen to be a nuisance but because the city government, as one social worker put it, “wanted to see beneficiaries do something productive with their time, to be more responsible in providing for themselves and their families.”

The process of discarding the old self did not necessarily target women. Values formation was intended for all housing recipients. However, participation in community-based moral reformation initiatives was highly gendered. With women taking on more voluntary roles in distributing assistance,

attending community activities to access aid for their families, and eventually participating in government programs in relation to their resettlement, women were disproportionately represented in values formation interventions. As women in the Philippines are also socially expected to provide “moral guidance” within their own families (Brickell & Chant, 2010), participation in values formation programs became substantively feminized. Apart from the emphasis on cleanliness, decorum, and productivity, “family harmony” and “proper guidance and disciplining of children” were among the core values heralded by the program. Such values are largely seen to be the domain of “women’s work,” which is indispensable to the task of social reproduction (Rai et al., 2011).

“Don’t Be *Losyang*”: Enhancing the New Self

“Women have many tasks and responsibilities to our homes and communities, but you must not forget about maintaining your prettiness, the prettiness of a woman! *Ayaw pagpaka losyang* (don’t be *losyang*)!” interjected one of the speakers during the formal launch of the Federation of Women’s Organizations in Tacloban North (FWO-TN). The launch, held at the City Hall’s satellite office in August 2018, was attended by nearly a hundred women from different resettlement sites. The speaker’s appeal to not becoming *losyang* – a derogatory slang term that refers to a woman’s bodily depletion (especially after having children) and/or to becoming undesirable/unattractive because of the lack of care for oneself – generated laughter among the audience. The speaker then continued, “If you used to be *amoy maaslom* [sour-smelling], you must strive to smell fresh. Can you imagine your husbands coming home tired after working in the city only to be greeted by a smelly wife?”

That launch was considered a milestone of post-Yolanda recovery and a celebration of women’s empowerment and leadership in their communities. Having laid down the foundation for citizens’ moral reformation, discussed in the previous section, the creation of the Federation was also regarded as an outcome of the city government’s initiatives to build the capacities of women to contribute to community-building during resettlement.

I found the appropriation of the term *losyang* above useful in understanding state interventions that operate on the level of women’s bodies and subjectivities. I had already encountered the term many times, both in interviews and informal conversations, and saw its use in relation to selfhood-development projects in two distinct but intertwined ways: (1) through mobilizing contempt toward the idea of the “*losyang* woman,” one is expected to mitigate against potential depletion as one carries out responsibilities as a renewed citizen; and, (2) by invoking *losyang*, one is incited to pursue a version of oneself that is deemed desirable according to a specific set of ideals around womanhood, i.e., altruistic, responsible – but also “pretty” and hygienic. In this sense, enhancement of the new self as one of the processes of subjectification in the post-disaster context is a powerfully gendered and embodied practice. As I demonstrate below, self-enhancement initiatives are deeply anchored in specific constructions

of femininity and motherhood, with *losyang* – pertaining to a state of physical, emotional, and psychological depletion – deployed as a metaphor for the undesirable self.

In one of the self-enhancement sessions I was invited to observe, a social worker (SW) was conducting the training at the GMA Kapuso Village.⁶ She held up her five fingers and showed them to the ten women who were present that day:

SW: Let us review what we have learned so far from our self-enhancement [sessions]. The first step to improving ourselves is to discover who we are.

The thumb represents who we are and what is important to us.

PARTICIPANT: We are mothers (*nanay*), the *ilaw ng tahanan*.

SW: That's right. What does the forefinger represent? It is our strengths and weaknesses. What did we talk about last time?

PARTICIPANT: We can be naggers sometimes. Nagger *kan duro, tim asawa nagawas nala kay madada ka man*. [When you keep on nagging, your husband will just take off because you are too noisy.]

SW: Women should also realize their mistakes, right? So, we reflect and tell ourselves "*may mali ngayon adto. Dapat sugad ngay-an ini an ak ginubhat* [I did something wrong. Next time I should do things differently]" ... Our middle finger represents what others and our family like and do not like about us ... The ring finger is our childhood experiences which affect who we are today. Like if we come from broken families [for example]. Lastly, our little finger represents our goals and aspirations. Could you tell me again what is your dream?

PARTICIPANT: *An hingyap hit nanay, katapos pag-eskwela it mga anak, maka-trabaho, waray sakit* [a mother's dream is to see that her children finish their education, that they find jobs, and do not get sick].

ANOTHER PARTICIPANT: *Kakuri gud it nanay, pastilan* [being a mother is very difficult, my goodness]! You need to take care of your children, even if they are all grown. Let's just make sure we don't become *losyang* so that our husbands will not replace us (laughs)!

This exercise was called the "Five Fingers of Life" and is found in the module called "Self-Enhancement and Community Participation," part of a training package entitled "Enriched Modular Packages for Women."⁷ The package was produced by a unit under the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), aptly called the Social Technology Bureau. The Self-Enhancement and Community Participation Training Program was developed in order to provide women "the opportunity to have self-discovery ... assess the different roles they perform as women, and acquire the skills on time management and financial management ..." and this is all done so that women can become "better individuals, family members and productive members of society" (STB, n.d., p. 1). The module comprised six sessions: (1) self-discovery/self-image; (2) women's rights;⁸ (3) different roles of women; (4) time management; (5) financial management; and (6) self-enhancement plan preparation. The session described

above allowed participants not only to enhance their capacities but also to address their limitations toward achieving empowerment. Moreover, it showed how certain values, beliefs, and sentiments linked to performances of traditional gender roles were inflected into the execution of the training program.

The session I attended on “Time Management” was particularly illuminating. Here, women’s multiple roles as mothers, wives, daughters, and community leaders and/or volunteers were stressed. Because of various overlapping responsibilities, according to Maita who facilitated the discussion, women as “household managers” in charge of cooking, cleaning, budgeting, caring for dependents, and disciplining children needed to develop skills in managing time. She then presented tips on time management (holding up a manila paper that contained a list of good time management practices), saying: “By making a plan and allocating time for activities, you can do things better and more quickly and also have time to care for yourself.” Caring for oneself here meant having time to take a bath, to dress “nicely,” “put on lipstick,” to relax, and look attractive for their husband. “That’s right ma’am,” one participant replied and then said jokingly, “we do need time for ourselves. No one will respect us if we are unkempt and just walk around in a *daster* all day.” The *daster* (from the English word “duster”) is a typical loose dress worn at home. Being *losyang* is also associated with the wearing of the *daster* – a symbol of disregard for one’s looks. It is considered shameful, for example, to greet visitors at home wearing only a *daster*.

Here, the empowered and enhanced self is constructed as someone who is efficient, in control of her time, self-caring, and has a positive self-image and esteem (respectability). The message here is clear: in taking on many responsibilities, one does not have to be *losyang* if one is efficient. Depletion accordingly results from the inability to care for oneself rather than as a product of social structures, ideologies, and unequal gender relations that attribute responsibilities for unpaid care work, household management and budgeting, and community voluntary work mainly to women (Rai et al., 2011).

In *Logics of Empowerment*, Aradhana Sharma (2008) critiques state and NGO interventions intended to “empower” women in India. She argues that although the achievement of women’s empowerment has historically been grounds for political action and solidarity for advancing gender equality, mobilizations of empowerment could also be a double-edged sword. Empowerment projects may in fact proliferate a “perilous means of governance” that seeks to produce “self-governing and self-caring social actors ... [to] direct their behaviours to entrepreneurial ends, and attach them to the project of rule” (Sharma, 2008, p. xx). In Tacloban, self-enhancement training and feminization of responsibility become mutually constitutive tools for governing. Women, whose responsibilities to home and community are reinforced, accentuated and harnessed, are at the same time provided with the tools and skills with which to manage such responsibilities.

As one progresses through the training packages for women, the focus also shifts from self-care to caring for children, to eventually improving and

participating in community life – thereby expanding the parameters of women's care responsibilities. Through the organizing activities conducted by the city's social workers in resettlement areas, women's community-based associations were formed, women leaders were trained in facilitating training module sessions, managing community savings, reducing disaster risk, being financially literate, and so on. Certificates would be handed out to participants who completed the capacity development activities – with some of these certificates ending up decorating the interiors of participants' concrete houses.

The generation and transmission of feelings of pride over the ability to enhance oneself were evident in a number of interviews. Apart from Nelia (discussed earlier in the chapter), Sally, 60, was also very enthusiastic in showing her certificates. Sally showed me photos of activities she had attended, including her participation in Zumba sessions conducted in the village. "I may be 60, but I am not *losyang*. I am easily the best dancer in my age group," she joked. Others expressed pride in a different way. Annie, for example, said:

I was not able to finish school. But I learned new things, like financial management. I never thought that this was something I could do. Now I help manage our community finances ... it is stressful, but it feels good to be trusted by others to do these things.

To supplement Self-Enhancement and Community Participation training, other workshops and seminars that primarily involve women are delivered through various avenues. Among the most notable are the Family Development Sessions held under the *Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino* Program (4Ps) and the Modified Conditional Cash Transfer (MCCT) Program, the national government's social protection initiative for the poorest Filipino families. Others include "parent-effectiveness seminars," "family life education," "mothers classes," leadership training, and similar skills-development training. The City Housing and Community Development Office, as well as partner non-government organizations, also facilitated similar capacity-development initiatives.

As discussed above, enhancing the new self required both technical (skills development) and affective interventions (generating pride and self-worth, as well as mobilizing contempt for the *losyang*) in order to achieve the state's vision of molding women into responsible and productive citizens. Evidently, self-enhancement is a way for people to be drawn into a particular ethical formation that aligned with the objectives of *government*. According to Daromir Rudnyckyj (2011, p. 72), "[a] well-ordered state entails the harmonisation of the interests of those who govern with the interests of the governed. Thus, government of the self and government of the collectivity become part of a single, seamless order." How then do processes of discarding the old self and enhancement of the new self serve to "harmonize" such interests, in an ideal sense? I address this in the next section of this chapter.

“We Have to Be Involved”: Activating Collective Allegiances

Whatever capacities we have, we need to act together ... What I hope for is that we change our attitudes. We need to have *pakikialam* for our community. Not in a way that we intrude in others’ private lives, but to be involved in our community. To participate in the activities of the community.

(Marina, 36, mother of three)

In 2018, I visited Janet (34, a single parent of two) at her resettlement site and engaged in *kumustahan* (loosely translated as “catching up”). We had met a year earlier when I was starting fieldwork and kept in touch until my next return. She had just been elected as an officer of their newly constituted Homeowners Association (HOA) a few months earlier and invited me to have a cup of *Kopiko*, a popular 3-in-1 instant coffee bought from her next-door neighbor’s *sari-sari* store [neighborhood grocery store]. We then talked about recent developments in their village.

KA-C: (After extending congratulations regarding Janet’s new role) How is it like to be elected as a leader in your HOA?

JANET: It’s additional work, but *ok lang* [it’s OK].

KA-C: What kind of work do you do at your association?



Figure 3.6 Women participating in weekly *pintakasi* or community service

JANET: Well, we mainly work with City Housing ... Sir Jim and Ma'am Dolly come here all the time to check in on us. We make sure that members of our HOA are following the rules.

KA-C: And, how has it been so far?

JANET: It's OK. But sometimes I get frustrated when I notice there are still many people who are *gabi'g ulo* [hard-headed] and still break the rules. But we need to keep reminding them ... it's our duty to the community.

Homeowners Associations (HOAs) are legally mandated bodies recognized by the state which, when registered, can address a range of governance concerns at the community level.⁹ The creation of such associations is also a condition for occupancy of housing units in Tacloban's resettlement communities. Duties and responsibilities of HOAs include negotiating for and maintaining public works, sourcing water and electricity connections, ensuring sanitation, upholding peace and order, collecting user fees for maintaining common spaces, and, more recently, disaster risk reduction (Ramalho, 2019). Thus, HOAs perform a range of responsibilities that embody qualities of government. But beyond the seemingly perfunctory functions of the HOA, Janet's account of her role as an officer of their HOA also revealed a quality of ethical citizenship which the state has attempted to cultivate – the sense of allegiance and duty toward an idea of “community.”

Earlier in this chapter, I demonstrated how post-disaster reconstruction and recovery initiatives aimed to create “virtuous” communities and sought to activate the citizens' self-governing powers (Rose, 1999; Rose & Miller, 2010). Citizenship here is not something possessed – as a “right” endowed upon an individual by the state – but is formed through relationships of identification. Citizens then, according to Rose (2000b, p. 98), “are bound to communities through ties of allegiance, affinity, and mutual recognition.” Thus, interventions that operated on one's sense of self (through discarding the old self and enhancing the new self), ultimately sought to re-attach the new and improved self to the rebuilt community by fostering feelings of allegiance, moral obligation, and duty.

Returning to the conversation with Nelia, her drive to participate in community-building activities is captured in the phrase “*kailangang makialam* [we have to be involved]!” As an expression of the Filipino value of *kapwa* or sense of shared self (Enriquez, 1978; Reyes, 2015), *pakikialam* in both its negative and positive connotations – either as unwanted intrusion, or as getting involved as an act of caring/concern – may be understood as a form of *justified intervention* in personal or community matters enacted through specific and varying moral registers. I find the notion of *pakikialam* as a particularly informative ethical resource which helps us understand how specific subjectivities, attachments, and sense of duty to community are nurtured and activated in the moral spaces produced within and through the HOA.

Pakikialam as Habit

As an “embodied disposition” (Zigon, 2009a) *pakikialam* is not necessarily performed calculatively, nor is the employment of its two senses (as intrusion and concern) mutually exclusive. In many of my interviews, *pakikialam* was often subtle and embedded in everyday practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Jakimow, 2015; Mahmood, 2005), shaped by participants’ experiences of resettlement, interactions with others, and encounters with institutions that sought to constantly re-shape their mindsets and sense of self. For example, Sally, a study participant who resided in one of the villages located in Cawayanville, told me how she embodied her duties as a community leader:

I feel *masaya* [happy] to know I am able to help out my *kapwa*. I am happy to see good changes [in our community] ... But if, for example, I see that [my neighbor’s property] is dirty, I really go to them and tell them. Because it is shameful (*nakakahiya*). If they do not clean up their own surroundings, I show them that even if it is raining, in the early morning, even if it is 5am, I am there cleaning up my place. So that they will see [my example], that my place is clean ... I encourage them to get involved in *pintakasi* [community service] so that we help each other in keeping our community clean.

In evoking the notion of *kapwa*, Sally demonstrates the (re)generation of moral and affective identification with her new community. To be able to act for the benefit of others whom she now considered *kapwa* generated “happy” feelings. She takes it as her duty to sustain the “good” changes in their neighborhood following resettlement – by setting an example for her neighbors to follow and by personally apprehending those who don’t seem to look after their surroundings well, through invoking feelings of shame. She then encourages neighbors to actively participate in *pintakasi*, a weekly activity wherein a representative from each household joins others in rendering at least one hour of community service – much like clean-up drives. In Sally’s account, her *pakikialam* of the affairs of other community members is layered onto the performance of daily habits and interactions with neighbors. Such actions are also propelled by specific moral orientations. Sally expressed that she wanted to influence people to take care of their environment and “not go back to their old ways.”

One’s involvement in HOA activities can then be understood as a moral experience. Moral experiences, according to Jakimow (2015, pp. 149–150; Zigon & Throop, 2014) are intersubjective sites where social norms and values are reaffirmed or negotiated, and they also provide opportunity for mutual recognition (as well as *misrecognition*) and identification where processes of self-becoming and self-reconfiguration unfold in contingent ways. Mandatory establishment of HOAs not only produced an apparatus of (post-disaster) development at the micro level of community, serving as an infrastructure for political mediation described above (Roy, 2009), but it also engendered moral spaces wherein the renewed citizen is provided the opening to enact the

enhanced, responsible, and ethical self (Jakimow, 2015). Thus, in Sally's case, her involvement in HOA activities enabled her to fulfill her perceived moral obligations toward her *kapwa* and fueled her desire to be a model citizen.

However, such moral experiences are also shaped by broader "assemblages of authority and ethics" (Roy, 2009, p. 160). The ethical self is thus configured and enacted in relation to the "moral codes of the institutional landscape" (Jakimow, 2015, p. 149). The kind of collective allegiance nurtured through community re-building initiatives (such as values formation, self-enhancement, and *pintakasi*) is highly attuned to the constant rejection of the "anti-citizen" (Rose, 2000b) – the deplorable squatter whose existence continuously threatens the very project of citizenship that the state has been striving to emplace. The citizen's affective and moral energies, then, are stirred and directed against the imagined undesirable self/other. Hence, while the mobilization of collective allegiances through HOA activities (such as clean-ups, monthly meetings, and Yolanda anniversary commemorations) becomes a means for the inclusion of subjects and spaces in the project of citizenship, such inclusion is also based on conformity to particular conditionalities. As Marcia, 54, a single parent, expressed:

If the HOA says something, you have to follow. For example, if they say we need to do *pintakasi*, then we do *pintakasi*. You have to follow so that you will not become *pasaway* [troublemaker] ... if you cannot fulfill your duties to the HOA [like participation and payment of monthly dues], you will have a bad record. You will be considered *delinkwente* [delinquent]. If you are *delinkwente*, you are not able to raise your *reklamo* [complaints] to the HOA. There are also penalties (fines) if you do not do your duties.

This disdain for the anti-citizen (the *pasaway* and *delinkwente*) is not only expressed and inscribed in habitual self-management but also in the more explicit disciplining of village residents through the HOA (Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1995).

Pakikialam as Discipline

Dolly, a field staffer of the City Social Welfare and Development Office, explained to me how the creation of HOAs helped village residents to manage their community. She acknowledged the crucial role of women in HOA operations by saying, "the women are really the ones who are focused [on the HOA] (*babae talaga ang nakatoka*).” In this conversation, Ma'am Dolly also invoked the important role of mothers in taking care of their families as key to their mobilization:

It is very good that they are now able to manage on their own [with less guidance from us]. One idea that [the women] suggested, which I liked very much, was setting up a neighborhood watch in order to keep the streets safe at night. Women take turns with patrol duties, enforcing curfews at 6

o'clock for children and 10 o'clock for students studying in Tacloban [city center] ... They have also volunteered to take turns looking after our field office [here at the resettlement site] and filing our records ... Without their constant patrols, their community could just be like [in the squatters area], with crimes running rampant (referring mainly to *kawat* or burglary). They also have clean-up drives through *pintakasi*, and they make sure their homes are well-kept.

In this account, we see the confluence of self-government, disciplinary power, and exercise of state power over a territory in and through the HOA (Dean, 1999). Women's capacities and commitments to care are harnessed in order to manage communities and keep people safe. They have therefore become responsible and, as one city government field staff stated, even "empowered." At the same time, patrolling and imposing curfews also helped regulate people's behavior. All of this takes place under the constant tutelage of state agents.¹⁰

Despite the seemingly democratic principles upon which the creation of HOAs are premised and their underlying discourse of empowerment and responsible self-management, the intensity of surveillance and regulatory practices being undertaken by the city government on – and *through* – these women-majority HOAs is very striking. Apart from developing neighborhood watch schemes and curfews, HOAs have a central role in occupancy surveillance – monitoring whether or not fellow residents are complying with village rules and regulations and doing their part as renewed citizens. Members watch and at the same time are conscious of being watched.

Marcia, for example, recounted how she tried to apprehend a neighbor who left their garbage on the street and ended up reporting them to the HOA:

They got angry because I was *pakialamera* [intrusive person]. *Susmaryosep!* [expression of exasperation]. It's because I have eyes that can see what they are doing, and I could smell the stench. *Hindi na tayo iskwat* [we are not squatters any more].

Moreover, Debbie, 55, one of the residents of a resettlement village, said with a hint of uneasiness in her words, "our village is 'best practice' because the rules are strictly enforced ... but this is because we are closest to the *mayores* [officials] who can easily see the things that we do." Here, Debbie is indicating the proximity of the building where HOA officers and the city's field staff work.

This mode of disciplinary power – which I have introduced here as *governing through women* – is reminiscent of Tara Cookson's analysis of the Peruvian Conditional Cash Transfer program where the state designated Mother Leaders as "local managers" of their communities. While such an approach was also framed through the discourse of empowerment, solidarity, and responsible motherhood, Mother Leaders served as the "eyes and ears" of the state (Cookson, 2018). On one hand, in theory, mobilizing women who were democratically elected by the community to be leaders, enables representation, brings the

state “closer” to communities, and potentially provides avenues for state accountability to ensure quality services and facilities in the resettlement sites. On the other hand, however, as Cookson observed in her own study (2018, p. 118), women leaders often functioned as a means of control which “ran the risk of becoming oppressive” as they tend to reproduce hierarchical and authoritarian relationships between state agents and housing beneficiaries. Frictions between neighbors were common, with the *pakialamera* becoming a subject of resentment.

From the women's narratives we see the employment of *pakikialam* in its dual sense: as an act of caring about (and therefore involving oneself in) the affairs of community, and as a form of intrusion enacted upon one's body, behavior, and personal space by the self, by others, and by the state. The activation of collective allegiances, primarily coursed through the HOA, produced moral experiences that affirmed norms of self-rule and duties to take part in community re-building, engaged with state desires and fantasies of citizenship, and at times, exposed the tensions that arose from intersubjective processes of performing and being subjected to *pakikialam* (such as frictions between neighbors and uneasiness at being constantly watched). With women figuring centrally in these processes, we find their capacities, care responsibilities, and energies actively being harnessed and instrumentalized to facilitate a “renewed” sense of community to advance the state's project of creating responsible citizens in the rebuilt (resilient) city.

“I Wear Lipstick for Myself!”: Spaces of Resistance

Rarely, if ever, are resettlement areas created and managed as intended. According to Ilana Feldman (2015, p. 249) in her analysis of refugee lives in the context of long-term displacement in camps:

Authorities cannot fully govern the experience, condition, or legitimacy of the camps. People's life choices, and their evaluations of these choices, constitute an argument that camps are not partial places in the way envisaged by either humanitarianism or some political positions. Rather, they experience them as legitimate sites for full, complex lives.

Relocation sites, similarly, function as contested spaces, simultaneously serving as sites of governance as well as arenas for resistance (see Gibb et al., 2025).

Often, resistance was less spectacular and more mundane – small-scale, relatively safe, yet functioned to challenge or curb power (Jenkins, 2017; Scott, 1987). For instance, during the Time Management session which I observed at the GMA Kapuso Village, there was clearly a performance of acquiescence to the lecture being given by the social worker. However, one participant whispered to me on the side, “Why should I wear lipstick just for my husband? I wear lipstick for myself!” Her whispered confession – that the motivation for a personal choice like wearing lipstick belonged solely to her – is a direct, if momentary, reclaiming of bodily autonomy and an assertion of self-directed

agency against the official agenda of self-enhancement. The contrast between the participant's silence during the session and her private aside encapsulates James Scott's distinction between the public and hidden transcripts (Scott, 1990). Her performance of submission satisfies the required "public transcript" of the resettlement authority, while the whisper – a hidden transcript – becomes a small, strategic moment of ideological resistance, exposing the fundamental gap between the state's vision of creating renewed subjects and the residents' own sense-making of their post-disaster experiences.

There were many such moments that I witnessed. As regulations dictated much of what people were and were not allowed to do, maneuvering around the restrictions governing daily life required creativity and taking calculated risks to avoid eviction from the resettlement village. Circumventing numerous bans on pets and livestock – which clearly were an important part of people's daily lives – led people to hide animals behind their houses. Such resistance thus became invisible but remained *audible*. Women removed (what officials regarded as) "clutter" – including laundry – from the front of their houses. "What can't be seen won't get you in trouble," said one participant. It became an open secret that many housing occupants kept the *bawal* things out-of-sight and out of officials' minds (including drinking with neighbors). Sometimes, neighbors would report on these *pasaway* activities (as shown above), but many also turned a blind eye. Feigning illness to avoid participation in HOA activities was also mentioned in my interviews. While some were subtle in subverting occupancy guidelines, others openly modified houses and built extensions – some of which were eventually demolished by the government.

While processes of subjectification seemingly attain their objectives of inculcating self-responsibility (to a certain extent), the ways in which women indirectly express their uneasiness and discomfort with such regulations – for example, skirting prohibitions, exhibiting awareness of unwanted surveillance, and coming into conflict with neighbors over their *pakikialam* – indicate frictions that belie this idealized form of citizenship. In Chapters 4 and 5, I reveal how resistance is also shown through people's refusal to accept government relocation or in their abandonment of their awarded housing units, favoring a return to the city center and coastal areas.

Conclusion

Community rebuilding in the aftermath of Yolanda entailed what I have referred to in this chapter as *governing through women*. Engaging with the conceptualizations of the feminization of responsibility and/or obligation, I have argued how attempts to manage resettlement communities in Tacloban have appropriated and mobilized notions of female altruism and "women's responsibilities" to create self-governing *and* governable communities. This instrumentalization of women's "essential capacities" for care has been a critical mode of governance deployed to enable the state to enact its fantasies of resilience and modernity.

This mode of governing required putting in place processes of subjectification and self-reconfiguration in order to align women's personal ethics, aspirations, and moral orientations with those of the state, as constitutive of the post-disaster citizenship project being pursued. By generating affective attachments to the notion of the responsible, desirable, and ethical citizen as well as circulating contempt and disgust toward the unruly and threatening anti-citizen embodied by the (*losyang*) squatter, the state attempted to forge and discipline subjects who are not only amenable to new norms and values but also become a means for circulating such norms and values in home and community. Couched in terms of "enhancement," and "community building," a woman's "voluntary" work in community recovery is celebrated as an expression of her "empowerment." This "virtuous model of empowerment" endows women with particular commendable traits: altruistic behavior, commitment to family welfare, risk-aversion, a sense of civic responsibility with little or no remuneration, and inclination to participate in collective action on a voluntary basis for the benefit of all (Kabeer, 1999, p. 41). If anything, however, this complex relationship between care, responsibility, citizenship, and virtuous empowerment, is in fact indicative of women's marginalization in the development process, as women assume the burdens of recovery "for the greater good" (Brickell & Chant, 2010; Chant, 2014). We thus find a containment of care and care responsibilities along visibly gendered lines. Ananya Roy (2009, p. 168) very fittingly describes the complex nature of subject formation of the virtuous empowered woman who voluntarily gives of her time, energy, and affections, which in this context is done in the service of state visions for recovery:

Voluntarism is not simply about volunteers; rather it derives from the Latin *voluntas* and indicates "will" and "desire". And so the feminized icon of voluntarism is empowered, she has will, she has desire. But at the same time, the gender order of development requires her moral discipline. She is thus simultaneously the disciplined subject and the willful subject, the empowered subject and the obedient subject, the desiring subject and the altruistic subject.

This chapter discussed how women figure in post-disaster governance of resettlement communities by detailing processes of subjectification enacted by the state through multiple interventions. However, the outcome of such processes of subject formation, as may have been devised by the state, cannot be fully determined. As morality and moral experiences are plural, subject formation is also contingent. While the production of good, responsible, and disciplined subjects may have been attained to some extent, the self is also inherently unwieldy, capable of reflective action, and thus can certainly conform to, defy, or reappropriate moral conventions put in place by social institutions. Therefore, this unwieldiness of the self allows one to live through moral experiences and enact the ethical self differently (Zigon, 2009a; 2009b). This contingent character of the self provides the opportunity and greatest potential for "the

reconfiguration of the self, and consequently the institutional landscape” (Jaki-mow, 2015, p. 150) and enacts a competing form of ethics and imagination that can pose a challenge to that which is embodied by the state. I engage with these themes in more detail in Part II.

Notes

- 1 *Bayanihan* is a Tagalog-based term derived from the word “bayan” which often interchangeably refers to nation, town, or community. *Bayanihan* is understood as the practice of providing mutual assistance (voluntary in nature) and is often exemplified by Filipino house-moving traditions where members of the community band together to assist another member in literally moving their house. Depictions of *bayanihan* usually involve images of men carrying a house on their shoulders. *Bayanihan* is often said to embody the Filipino “community spirit,” characterized by forms of reciprocity and mutual cooperation to achieve community well-being (Hollnsteiner 1961).
- 2 There are various shades to the concept of *pakikialam*. In the sense that Nelia has used it here, the notion of *pakikialam* refers to involving oneself in community affairs as a moral obligation and an expression of care. A more negative connotation would be to intrude or intervene in others’ personal affairs.
- 3 The term “totally washed out” is an official classification used by the government to determine the level of damage to houses. Being classified as “totally” or “partially” washed out also determined the amount of aid a family was entitled to. These official terms later became employed by disaster survivors as a means to establish who was more “deserving” of aid or who the “true” survivors were (in terms of *who* lost their homes and *who* suffered more). This classification system inadvertently led to an articulation of a hierarchy of suffering among “deserving victims” and caused tension between the disaster survivors themselves.
- 4 Some participants used the term “subdivision” instead of “village” to denote the same cultural values attached to these terms.
- 5 In the anthropological literature, the term “rites of passage” was first used by French anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1960). Rites of passage pertain to ceremonial events that mark a transition from one stage of life to another. Such rites, according to van Gennep, are constituted by three distinguishable phases: separation, transition, and (re-)incorporation. His work has been foundational to further investigations on rites of passage in different context. Victor Turner (1969), for example, drew on van Gennep’s work on *liminality* (the condition of being in-between) to develop his idea on *communitas* (a temporary sense of one-ness that occurs in liminal conditions).
- 6 GMA Kapuso Village is one of the villages found in Cawayanville. *Kapuso* is a local term meaning one-at-heart. The village was constructed in partnership with the GMA Kapuso Foundation, a civic organization affiliated with a major broadcasting company GMA Network.
- 7 Under the national program of the DSWD, a program for men was established called the Empowerment and Reaffirmation of Parental Abilities (ERPAT). It also has its own modular training packages geared toward understanding shared parental responsibilities and ensuring good family relations. However, the modules for women have a more expansive content, including sessions on children’s health, environmental sanitation, leadership and business management, and social communication skills. In Tacloban particularly, ERPAT interventions were not prominent in resettlement areas nor were they mentioned in interviews. On a national scale, ERPAT programs have primarily focused on encouraging men to work against domestic violence.

- 8 The module included a session titled “Women’s Rights,” which mainly contained a description of Philippine laws that directly pertained to women.
- 9 The establishment and management of Homeowners Associations are legally mandated under Republic Act 9904, otherwise known as the Magna Carta for Homeowners and Homeowners Associations.
- 10 It is important to note that while surveillance in a general sense is stark in all resettlement areas, the intensity of surveillance also varies across different areas. Cawayanville, for example, is more closely monitored than Ridgeview Park, as city field staff have a physical office on-site.

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Part II

Re-Imagining Resilience



Figure B A wooden house in the “danger zone”

I only dream of having a simple house like this one. Safety is important. But so are jobs and having a means of living. I do not aspire to be rich. Not like that. Just a simple life – that we are able to get by every day, not worrying about where to find money [to pay for things] like electricity. That is all I am asking for ... I already had a home before Yolanda, I had a good life which I really worked hard for. My husband and I did not make much but we were getting by, we had plans. Yolanda destroyed my dreams, everything. Here [at the resettlement site], life is much more difficult ... I feel so out of place.

(Liza, 28, married, mother of two)

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4 A House of One's Own

Entangled Aspirations

As women spoke of the pain and trauma brought about by Yolanda as well as the hardships of being displaced from familiar environments, there were always points in our conversations where their hopes and dreams for the future would surface. Dreams for a good life, overcoming poverty (*maahon sa kahirapan*), and providing their children with opportunities for a bright future were often articulated. Sometimes, when women acknowledged their own material limitations, the seeming unattainability of such dreams brought on tears. But, at the same time, hope for a better future despite the odds drove their resolve to keep going. “Yolanda was terrible. It is painful to think about,” said Julie, 25, “but we can’t always just be talking about Yolanda. We need to move on from here.” To move on, as Julie expressed, was not necessarily about forgetting Yolanda. Rather, she was referring to the need to rebuild their lives and work towards the future.

Rebuilding from disaster necessarily takes on an aspirational character oriented toward an imagined future. According to Henrietta Moore (2011, p. 1), “[w]e may be haunted by our pasts, but human social life is equally lived in relentless forward gear.” The past experience of disaster may shape the present, hold lessons, and serve as an impetus for change, but aspirations for the future are likewise formative for identifying and working toward the kind of change envisioned. Hopes, fantasies, and desires are, as Moore (2011; 2015) suggests, key to understanding the ways in which people reinvent and position themselves. How people imagine their relationships with themselves and others in the process of reinvention toward achieving a hoped-for future is what “links human agency to forms of the possible” (Moore, 2011, p. 18). Thus, to understand decisions and actions for recovery requires taking seriously the fantasized imaginings of, and aspirations for, post-disaster futures and using these as an analytical lens.

Engaging with Appadurai’s (2004) notion of *capacity to aspire*, I consider how aspirations create openings for transformation. Aspirations are not simply the hopes, dreams, and desires for the future that are privately harbored by individuals. They are simultaneously subjective, intersubjective, and political

processes that are influenced and structured by a range of available cultural resources: ideologies, value systems, family and community histories, as well as people's lived experiences (Zipin et al., 2015, p. 228). According to Appadurai (2004), the capacity to aspire is a cultural capacity for navigating life so that end goals become achievable, given people's existing capabilities. Aspirations, therefore, provide a way to map out individual and collective horizons.

Tied to hope and the pursuit of the "good life" (Appadurai, 2013), the notion of aspirations as a form of navigational capacity is particularly useful in understanding strategies and routes created to achieve a hoped-for recovery. However, following Jakimow (2015, pp. 97–98), I understand aspirations as not necessarily leading toward an end-goal, with its implied determinacy, but rather toward an open-ended possibility, including possibilities for imagining non-conventional futures. With this, I view aspirations as a social and political practice which provides a means for charting possible lives (Pinelli, 2013; Weiss, 2002). To navigate (alternative) potentials for recovery, then, requires broadening the capacity to aspire beyond hegemonic visions of resilience.

This chapter examines women's navigations of post-disaster recovery in light of their aspirations for the future. To understand how women actively position themselves in relation to processes of recovery and reconstruction, I draw attention to the role of aspirations in shaping the ways in which women make sense of, as well as fashion themselves in response to, being "built back better" (Moore, 1994). Hopes and aspirations matter because they disclose the creation of *possibility* (Anderson, 2006, p. 733) – a notion which is intrinsically embedded, yet is hardly examined, in efforts to understand disaster recovery. What aspirations inform women's notions of recovery? What capacities are enabled by such imaginings? What implications do the entanglements of individual hopes and desires for the future have on broader social configurations and resilience?

I argue that women's subjectivities, self-fashioning, and agency in the post-Yolanda context are shaped and animated by what I call *entangled aspirations*. I employ entangled aspirations to refer to how various aspirations, drawn from multiple social and cultural resources (Appadurai, 2004; Copestake & Camfield, 2010; Zipin et al., 2015), are together enmeshed in the (inter)subjective lives of women as they strive toward possible futures. My use of *entanglement* emphasizes how multiple aspirations that one might harbor are not self-contained but rather come into existence through social relationships and encounters with material objects and environments – as part of an iterative process of co-constitution and becoming (Barad, 2007). To conceive of aspirations as socially embedded, multiple, and entangled allows us to understand how women may fashion themselves and enact recovery in different ways beyond, if not in refusal of, state prescriptions of "better" recovery. Thus, despite attempts to shape subjectivities according to the state's visions for recovery through mechanisms of governing (Chapters 2 and 3), self-(re)constitution in the aftermath of disasters is never fully captured by regulation nor is it foreclosed (see also Cupples, 2007). In the same way, aspirations can be influenced but are never entirely "disciplined."

The forging of possible lives can be productively analyzed by examining the circulation of hopes and desires around post-disaster housing. In what follows, I draw attention to how concrete houses have played a central role in shaping visions for recovery in Tacloban. I analyze housing as a site of entangled aspirations linking people to “broader social, moral and political universes” (Elinoff, 2016, p. 613) and how, as such, it produces entangled ways of becoming (Archambault, 2018; Barad, 2007; Haraway, 2008). I highlight how understanding becoming through the lens of desires for the future facilitates an appreciation of how aspirations can moor people to hegemonic visions of rebuilding better, on one hand. On the other hand, these can have a generative potential for enabling alternative articulations and enactments of pathways to recovery when fantasies of a better, safer, and more resilient life promised by relocation begin to fray. I conclude with the point that viewing recovery as an expression of a *politics of possibility* (Cretney, 2017; Koster & de Vries, 2012), rather than as a predetermined outcome, has significant implications for re-imagining resilience.

Concrete Dreams

A feature story posted in April 2016 on a government website devoted to the Yolanda reconstruction reads: “For the 306 families from Tacloban City who suffered the brunt of Typhoon ‘Yolanda’ when it struck almost three years ago, *having a new home is heaven sent*” (emphasis added).¹ Entitled “New homes, renewed life for ‘Yolanda’ survivors,” this story was referring to the first batch of families being transferred to the resettlement village of Ridge View Park, which was among the first permanent housing sites to be occupied in Tacloban North. Complete with “*pabaon* packs” or provisions containing 25 kilograms of rice, plastic mats, mosquito nets, blankets, and cooking pots, these families were reportedly “joyful” and “excited” to move into their “brand new” and “safer” homes. A survivor was then quoted as saying:

Diri na malubak it karsada, sementado na. Diri na kahoy it am balay, semento na gihap [The roads are no longer rough and bumpy, they are now made of cement. Our houses are no longer made of wood, they are now also made of cement].²

“There is something about cement,” Archambault (2018, p. 692) writes, “that captures the imagination.” In modernist visions of development, concrete is commonly regarded as an index of progress that mediates dreams for a better life (Archambault, 2018). Concrete is not only a physical material, but it is also affectively charged and fantasy-inciting (Archambault, 2018; Navaro-Yashin, 2012; Stolz, 2019). With the growing interest in the relationship between affect and materiality (Allerton, 2013; Bennett, 2010; Gordillo, 2014; Navaro-Yashin, 2012), concrete houses, in particular, have figured in a number of anthropological studies in terms of how these have served as expressions of

aspirations (Aguilar, 2009; Hauer et al., 2018; Stolz, 2019). Filomeno Aguilar (2009), for example, describes how transnational Filipino migrants construct conspicuous “dream houses” in the Philippines in order to exhibit their attainment of success overseas and maintain ties with the homeland (Thomas, 1998). In various studies such as Aguilar’s, concrete houses serve as tangible manifestations of aspirations ingrained in understandings of progress and narratives of getting ahead, whether in the Philippines or elsewhere (Bulloch, 2018; Stolz, 2019). The story I highlighted above exemplifies this hopeful encounter with concrete: it is a narrative of a “blissful” exodus from Tacloban’s danger zones, with hopes for a new and better life pinned on the acquisition of a concrete house widely referred to as *balay nga bato*.

Balay nga bato has a special significance in imaginations of recovery in Tacloban. Dominant articulations of Build Back Better have privileged *balay nga bato* as an exemplar of resilience, stability, and permanence. It was often invoked in contrast to the “flimsy,” “makeshift,” and “non-durable” dwellings that made urban poor informal settlements supposedly so vulnerable to disasters (see Department of the Interior and Local Government & AVID, 2015; TACDEV, 2014). *Balay nga bato*, as both an idiom for resilience and modernity, and as an aspirational technology of recovery (Chapter 2), embodied the mainstream discourses of aspirations for a better post-Yolanda future.

The desire for *balay nga bato* was a major theme in women’s narratives. Yet, it was not necessarily the disaster-resilient qualities of *balay nga bato* that enlivened their fantasies.³ That the house was able to shelter them from the elements certainly mattered and was seen as valuable by study participants. However, entwined with the desire to be safe and to obtain *balay nga bato*, with its connotations of progress, was a longing for *kalugaringon nga balay* [a house of one’s own].

Aspirations for home ownership are especially pronounced in contexts of high but unmet demands for adequate urban housing in the Philippines (Alcazaren et al., 2011; Arcilla, 2019; Berner, 1997; Porio & Crisol, 2004; Teodoro & Co, 2009). As capital investments increase competition for valuable land in Philippine cities (Berner, 1997; Porio, 2002), the unaffordability of housing and exclusion from productive urban spaces fuel much of the anxieties that many people, especially the urban poor, harbor. Evictions from prime urban spaces are an everyday reality for informal settlers and are often undertaken in the name of modernization and development, economic growth, and, more recently, disaster risk reduction (Alvarez & Cardenas, 2019; Ramalho, 2019; Watson, 2009).

Therefore, it is not at all surprising how the offer of *balay nga bato*, with its ideational promises of modernity, is a seductive proposition: it allows the urban poor to imagine a future where fears of eviction become a thing of the past. This sentiment is succinctly but clearly expressed by Anita (30, married mother of three): “All I want is a simple life, to have a house where we won’t have to always worry about being evicted (*hindi na kami paaalisin*), a decent house (*disenteng bahay*).”

In what follows, I engage with women's yearnings for a house of one's own in relation to the circulation of (hegemonic) aspirations directed toward *balay nga bato*. I show how dominant aspirations anchored on values of modernity are often interlaced with aspirations that are born out of the women's own lived realities of insecurity. The entanglement of these different forms of aspirational groundings (Zipin et al., 2015) give rise to expressions and enactments of hope and desires for the future. They also reveal the tensions created when dreams fail to concretize. With the understanding that the house is a site where hopes take place, I ask: what dreams does *balay nga bato* animate? What dreams are traded off, disappointed, or deferred? What possibilities are opened for remaking subjectivities and social relations in pursuit of these dreams? What potentials exist for strengthening their capacity to aspire?

To address these lines of enquiry, I present the stories of three women that provide us with a glimpse of their journeys as they struggled to rebuild their lives after Yolanda: Liza (Ridgeview Park), Nelia (Cawayanville), and Julie (Pope Francis Village).⁴ As they narrate their movement through time (recounting experiences before and after the disaster, and expressing prospects for the future) and space (displacement and resettlement), their aspirations – whether articulated or latent – are woven into their day-to-day navigation of the post-Yolanda context.

Three Stories

Liza: Feeling Out of Place



Figure 4.1 Rowhouses at Ridge View Park

I do not want to put my hopes in a house that is not mine, because it could easily be taken away. Once it is taken away, no matter how much effort you put into it, there is nothing you can do. That is why I want a house of my own ... I want my children to have a home. What if I die? What will happen to them? I want to be *segurista* when it comes to the future of my children [*segurista* is someone who is careful to always make sure that one gets the best out of a situation].

(Liza)

Like many survivors, Liza and her family fled Tacloban City in the immediate aftermath of Yolanda aboard a military C130 airplane that took them to an evacuation site in Manila, the Philippine capital. They stayed in Manila for many months until it was deemed safe to return home. However, Liza did not have much of a home to return to. Her house, which she and her husband had slowly built together in the years prior to Yolanda, was “totally washed out” – a term often used to refer to homes being completely damaged.

Upon her return, Liza had hoped to receive aid from the government to help rebuild her house. However, no-build zones were already being enforced, and she learned that those living in danger zones needed to be relocated. To add to her anxieties, she was told that the deadline for registration for permanent housing applications had already lapsed and beneficiaries were already enumerated and determined.⁵ Her uncle, upon hearing of her predicament, offered to include her as a family member (or secondary beneficiary) in his Disaster Assistance Family Access Card (DAFAC) – more commonly referred to as the *Green Card* – a kind of passport provided by the Department of Social Welfare and Development used to claim certain forms of assistance and entitlements.

Families are given priority in beneficiary selection for the government housing projects. Thus, lone applicants, such as Liza's uncle, would not have been eligible if she and her family were not registered as part of the household beneficiaries listed in the Green Card. Having been listed in her uncle's Green Card, however, Liza was now impeded from applying for a housing unit for herself. Green Cards, and ultimately housing awards, were also typically issued to male heads of households.

Liza's uncle nonetheless assured her that she would be the one to inherit the house. Because of this promise, Liza accepted relocation. But she later regretted her decision. She experienced immense hardships at the bunkhouses for over a year, and tensions rose between her and her uncle who had used his Green Card to impress upon her his authority as head of the household. He constantly threatened her family with eviction if they did not do chores, participate in mandatory activities and community service on his behalf, as well as give him money to express *utang na loob* [debt of gratitude, or more literally translated as “debt of the self”] for sheltering them. Liza then very emotionally said:

Others might be happy because, from living in a small house, they now have a bigger house made of *bato* [concrete]. But for me, it is different. I just live in a house that is not mine, with a person who keeps telling me to my face (*pina-pamukha*) ... 'I can kick you out any time I want to,' especially when he is drunk ... You know what, I never dreamed of having a beautiful house, a big house. My only dream was to have a house of my own. I was already happy before Yolanda, because everything I had, I really worked hard for. *Nai-pagmamayabang ko yon sa sarili ko* [I took pride in myself for that]. That's why it's very painful for me, what happened during Yolanda. I was very proud that even though I built a simple house, I never asked for money, not a single *centavo* ... Here I do not have peace of mind ... I am out of place, this is not my home, my neighbors are different, things are so different, life is harder.

I then asked Liza what she meant by life being harder, which she had reiterated a number of times. She narrated how she had to stop working when they were relocated to Ridge View because of the distance to the city center, "No one will take care of my children. I can't go anywhere. So now only my husband earns income, which is not enough ... I wish I could work again, but I can't go anywhere," she said. She then added:

Here, everything is expensive, everything needs to be bought, even water. We are so *sosyal* now [well-off, sarcastically said]. We have *balay nga bato*. We used to get water from the tap but now, we buy and drink mineral water, which costs 30 pesos.⁶ *Sosyal*. My uncle keeps saying that he wants us to build a second floor for the house. Of course, I want that too ... But I tell him, how can we afford that, we can barely find money for food! ... I need to make sure that we are also able to pay electricity bills because if our electricity gets cut off, we will become 'trending' in the neighborhood.

Liza explained that the word "trending" is in reference to the phenomenon of a topic becoming popular and widely proliferated online, especially on social media. When she said she did not want to become "trending," she was seeking to avoid the shame associated with becoming a subject of talk as a consequence of being unable to pay her bills.

Liza's unease, discomfort, and anxiety in their new home mainly stemmed from her desire to provide her children with a good future. Having a house of her own was important for Liza because she saw it as a way to give security to her children, so that "they won't have to go through what I have been through ... and even if I leave this world, I could at least give them that." Liza shared that she was orphaned at a young age and had to live with different relatives while growing up. "I grew up with other people telling me what to do, just because I did not have a home, I was always told to do things I did not want to do." Just when she had finally achieved the level of independence she had aspired for, she said, all that was suddenly stripped from her after Yolanda. She was once again experiencing the same feeling of not being in control of her life.

For Liza, securing a home for herself and for her family was always her dream. *Balay nga bato* had its appeal, shown when she indirectly refers to it as something generally considered desirable and in her ambitions on being able to make improvements on the house. However, the desirability of *balay nga bato* was contingent on the fulfillment of other mutually constitutive aspirations: security for the future of her children and living a life of dignity and sufficiency.

Liza's aspirations for having a house of her own is also drawn from her past experiences as an orphan, going from home to home and not feeling like she belonged. This "affective history" (Jakimow, 2015; Shah, 2012) has played an important role in shaping Liza's aspirations for life after Yolanda. Hard work and a sense of accomplishment, which were things she learned to value through her lived experiences, were central to her constructions not only of *what* one desires for the future but also *how* such desires are to be achieved. Hence, Liza showed pride in talking about the "simple house" that she and her husband had built. On the other hand, she was generally less impressed by the housing provided by the government because she had no sense of accomplishment over the process of acquiring the house.

For as long as Liza's ideals were not satisfied, she continuously developed strategies to actualize her dreams. This included participating in community affairs such as Homeowners Association meetings so she could get more information on developments in the resettlement sites, and negotiating with government personnel to help her get her own house. She said:

It is important to know your way around government [bureaucracy], because no matter how good a person you are, if you do not know the ins-and-outs (*pasikot-sikot*), you cannot achieve what you want. You need to have knowledge and *diskarte* [skills for navigating life circumstances].⁷

She navigated both community spaces and bureaucratic processes in her attempts to find ways to move out of her uncle's residence and seek out opportunities to earn a living for herself. Thus, her participation in community activities were not simply to comply with requirements for occupancy as discussed in Chapter 3, but rather, she used these to search for alternatives to her current condition – leveraging her participation as an indication of her being a responsible and therefore deserving citizen. Outside the formal "invited spaces" (Cornwall, 2003) of community participation, she was able to form friendships with a few women in their neighborhood who gave her emotional support. Her friends also facilitated her participation in community enterprises such as water distribution and rice retailing, which helped her earn some money.

As she steered and negotiated her way in these various avenues, Liza often invoked her identity as *totoong na-Yolanda* ["true victim" of Yolanda]. This appropriation of victimhood centered on her experience of *suffering* and losing a home:

I was *totoong na-Yolanda*. I deserve aid because *naghirap ako* [I suffered]. You can ask my [former] neighbors, I really had a house that was totally washed out. I have the right to ask the government for a house of my own.

In this sense, Liza employs her position of vulnerability strategically in order to emphasize the legitimacy of her claims. Despite her feelings of confinement and despair, she still expressed with determination, “I will fight for the chance (*kaya kong ipaglaban*) to have a house of my own again.”

Nelia: Finding One's Place



Figure 4.2 Rowhouses in Cawayanville

Sometimes I think that with Yolanda, something good also came out of it ... I finally have a house that I can call my own. It makes me emotional ... honestly, my dream house would be Camella Homes [the most extensive middle-class housing development in the country]! (laughs) But attaining that needs money. For someone like me who is jobless, how do I achieve that? *Hanggang tingin na lang doon sa bahay* [one can only watch with longing at those houses]. With my house, it is small, but it is mine.

(Nelia)

Nelia was abandoned by her husband after Yolanda. She was left to raise her three small children on her own while striving to survive the hardships of being both homeless and jobless. Nelia was well-educated, having reached tertiary education at a provincial college, and was earning a living before Yolanda hit Tacloban. It had been extremely challenging for her to lose her house, her job, and then be abandoned without child support. This had negatively impacted her self-esteem:

I felt ashamed whenever I would meet my former classmates. Out of all students in our class, everyone had expected me to make something of myself. I don't even want to go back to my hometown because some of my classmates are now accountants, teachers, others are even working abroad ... I once saw a picture of them during an alumni reunion, they were there, and I was just here. My [former classmates] are the ones leading good lives ... *Hiyang-hiya ako* [I feel very ashamed]. I imagine them telling me, "hey, you were at the top of our class and now this is all you have become." I feel so small sometimes (*nakakapanliit*). My God, I feel so small. Because here I am jobless, married to an uneducated man who abandoned me and my children at a time of hardship ... but I don't regret it, because I have them [referring to her children], they are my consolation. I have a house now that is really my own. At least I do not have to depend on anyone to give me shelter. Thinking about it makes me cry (*naiiyak ako*).

Ensuring a home for her family was her priority after Yolanda. So, when she heard about the resettlement program, she strived to get herself included on the list of beneficiaries. At first, Nelia had difficulty getting her desired place in the government housing projects. While staying at one of the bunkhouse settlements near the permanent relocation site (what is now Cawayanville), she started to do volunteer work, along with many others, for various recovery initiatives. This got her noticed by government field staff and she was later offered a place in one of the resettlement villages in Cawayanville. "It's important that they know you and you know people in government. You learn how to avail of assistance ... knowing certain people can help you," Nelia said.

Nelia was later given different tasks in housing construction such as overseeing inventories, securing construction materials, and assisting city field staff in recording hours that housing beneficiaries spent for their "sweat equity," as well as performing "sweat equity" herself. Sweat equity, an integral part of many NGO-led housing projects in the Philippines,⁸ refers to unpaid manual labor rendered by housing beneficiaries as one's contribution to the costs of building a house. Sweat equity was widely applied in donor-partnered housing projects in Tacloban. Commenting on the house that was given to her, she said:

I have always wanted my own house ... I am satisfied with my house now. I love my house. I know the quality of construction because I oversaw the inventories. I saw the materials used, the hollow blocks, and how the houses were made. I also labored for my house. My hands were bloodied with all my injuries, I would cry silently with the pain, *ang hapdi-hapdi* [immense stinging pain]. Sometimes I would accidentally hit myself with a hammer. But it's OK. I told myself that in the end, I am the one who would benefit ... well, sometimes when it rains, some water would drip from the roof. But the house itself is sturdy. I am proud of it.

Nelia's volunteer work at the resettlement site also improved her sense of self-worth. "How did you feel about being asked to take on these different responsibilities?" I asked her. She replied:

I liked volunteering. I felt proud of the work that I was doing – to be trusted by engineers and [government field staff] to help oversee construction. They tell me my work seemed very hard. It's true, but I am still benefitted. What I gained from that was the trust of engineers and even other beneficiaries. People cannot simply access construction materials without going through me.

Along with the recognition of her contributions as a volunteer, Nelia gradually established herself as a community leader and later became elected as an officer of their Homeowners Association (HOA). While, at first, she found it extremely difficult to adjust to the new environment at the resettlement site, given that she did not know any of the other housing beneficiaries, she later formed friendships with other women. The first time I met Nelia was at her place and it was approaching lunch time. I was struck by how other women started to arrive one after the other, bringing different kinds of food, transforming our one-on-one conversation to a group gathering, sharing stories over boiled bananas, rice, fried fish, and bottled water. "This is how I have survived," Nelia told me then, quite emotionally. "I don't have money, I am jobless, I don't have a husband, but [these women] have helped me survive. They give me food when I and my children have nothing to eat," she added. Nelia attributed this show of care and solidarity to divine providence upon which she pinned her hope for survival, "just when you think you have nothing, really nothing (*walang-wala*), God provides, even in the last two minutes,⁹ something will come along."

For Nelia, resettlement has allowed her to "find her place" despite the ongoing hardships and vulnerabilities she encountered. Having acquired a home that she had been aspiring for, and having participated in its construction, stirred feelings of attachment and pride. Woven in her narrative was the desire for affirmation, of being able to live up to people's expectations, given her relatively high educational attainment. Her significant involvement in their Homeowners Association helped shaped her relationship to herself and to others. The new leadership roles she found herself performing helped raise her sense of worth. However, Nelia undertook volunteer work and active participation in community activities, like Liza, as a strategy for securing her family's place in the government's housing project.

Yet, amidst her pronouncements indicating satisfaction with resettlement, Nelia still yearned to have her own income. Being at the resettlement site limited her movement as well as her opportunities to find a job. Her inability to adequately provide for her family, without having to depend on others, was a source of suffering. She would often cry when she started talking about her children's future, given her economic insecurities. "My happiness as a mother comes when I see my children happy and well. My dreams are for them," she said. "What dreams do you have for yourself?" I asked, to which she answered:

My only hope is for my community, that we will be given livelihoods that will sustain us. Permanent jobs for both men and women ... Right now, many of us are deep in debt, there is no secure livelihood here. If only we would be given work, it would give us some breathing space (*makakaluwag*). Only then, I think, I would have more freedom to pursue dreams for myself.

Julie: Defying Displacement



Figure 4.3 Transitional shelters for beneficiaries of Pope Francis Village in Costa Brava, Tacloban City

We came back to this place, because our *pakabuhi* [livelihood] is here. We are a fishing community. Typhoons will come, as they always have. Storm surges will happen again. After Yolanda, of course we are afraid ... [but] it's difficult to always be thinking about typhoons that may come, because we need to think about where to find food ... I dream of having my own house, *syempre* [(of course), a house that is safe ... But we also need to be able to support ourselves, earn income. Not to be rich, but also not always worrying about how to meet our needs.

(Julie)

Julie (25, mother of two) provides a different account of life after Yolanda from that of Liza and Nelia. She was among the few who had refused government relocation. She resided in Costa Brava, a coastal village in the area of San Jose which was among the heaviest affected by Yolanda. The area was now a site

for transitional shelters set up by FRANCESCO, a consortium of faith-based and civil society organizations which was implementing a “people-driven”¹⁰ post-disaster housing project in Tacloban. Despite the massive and ongoing community relocations to Tacloban North which was being carried out during the time I was conducting my fieldwork, I was intrigued by these few communities who were still staying within the “danger zones” declared by the state. “We choose to stay here for as long as we can,” said Julie, “because our *paka-buhi* [livelihood] is here.”

Julie bore the trauma of Yolanda, recounting personal experiences of walking through rapidly rising waters and witnessing the devastation that followed: of entire villages being swept away, neighbors losing their lives. She had feared for the life of her then 6-week-old baby whom she held desperately close to her in efforts to escape the deadly storm surges. “If the experience of the typhoon was difficult,” Julie said, “what came after was even harder ... at one point I said, we should have all just died.” Apart from losing their houses to the storm surges, having lack of access to sufficient food and other basic needs, and the indignities¹¹ of being dependent on aid, they were no longer allowed to go back to where their old homes used to stand. The place had been declared a no-build zone, and humanitarian organizations were discouraged from providing assistance to those who returned (Porteria, 2015; Thomas, 2015; Yee, 2017; 2018). Moreover, since the ownership of the land had been contested for decades, claimants of the land¹² purportedly saw the disaster as an opportunity to clear the area of informal settlers:

We first went to Samar (neighboring island) [for refuge] onboard a *bangka* [small fishing boat], but after a while we decided to return here because of our livelihood. But when we got back here, we were surprised that the area was fenced off! There was already a fence! They used barbed wire ... they did not want people to come back. But we said, we have already grown accustomed (*nasanay*) to this place. So, we pulled out the barbed wires, or dug under them, and built makeshift homes in the [cordoned area]. We also stayed in tents provided by UNHCR, but it was difficult. It was so crowded with three families in one tent, no blankets or pillows, just the tarpaulin between us and the ground. It was cold. By day, the tents became *mapaso* [hot] so we stayed in the houses we rebuilt. At night we went back to the tents because there were many mosquitoes ... we were like *kulisap* [insects], flitting around, trying to find our place ... this was very difficult for me especially since I had a baby.

The city government attempted to offer residents of Costa Brava a place in the bunkhouses where they would await permanent houses in Tacloban North. Many of them, including Julie, her partner, her parents, and her sister's family, refused to relocate to state-managed resettlement sites. “We were not interested in living in the bunkhouses. We did not want to be relocated far from each other and our livelihoods,” said Julie.

The entry of the Urban Poor Associates (UPA), a Manila-based non-governmental organization that later formed part of the FRANCESCO consortium, was a pivotal moment for the community, Julie shared. She said that UPA had started organizing their community, telling residents that if they could show that they have a “strong community,” they would be included in FRANCESCO’s housing project, located about 7 kilometers from the city center.¹³ This promise raised her hopes. Julie said that she participated in acts of *bayanihan* [voluntary mutual assistance] to clean up their village and build the transitional shelters to demonstrate that she could be part of the “strong community.” With the precariousness of their situation, given the constant threats of eviction, the offer of a new house in Pope Francis Village gave her hope of overcoming the hardships she was experiencing:

I joined other women in *bayanihan*. Women were really the ones who carried all the plywood, we walked in the mud, we really did that! Women helped each other [in constructing houses]. Women did all these things because the men were out earning a living ... it was good, I was happy even if it was difficult. I said to myself, men were not the only ones who have strength. Women have it too ... in fact I realized that women do more things than men. Because men very seldom washed clothes. They seldom fetched water. They seldom took care of children. But we [women] do all these things, even the things that men do.

“These were things you realized after doing *bayanihan*?” I asked. “Yes,” she said, “that [experience] also made me say ‘ah, so this is what it means to be urban poor. So, it is like this.’ I felt that we became a community because of that.”

From then on, Julie had been participating in community activities, joining “mobilizations” or rallies for the right to housing support, and protesting against the tide embankment project being implemented by the national government, which Julie says is a threat to the livelihoods of fishing communities like theirs.

Since her family was a beneficiary of the housing project at Pope Francis Village, I asked her if they were going to leave their transitional site in the near future (Figure 4.4). She said:

The houses in Pope Francis Village are beautiful, much more beautiful than the ones in the north. The house is what I always dreamed of having. It has a second floor and a balcony ... We volunteer 700 hours to help with the construction, so we know that the houses are well-made ... but for as long as it is possible for us to stay where we are, we will stay. We will fight for the right to stay on this land, because our *pakabuh* [livelihood] is here ... We are provided relocation so we can be safe. But we can just stay here when the weather is good and evacuate to the relocation site when a typhoon comes. That’s our plan. We just need to take better care and be safe (*ikmat na la*). We want to stay here, have our children grow up here, as we did. We expressed our stand to UPA, and they said that for as long



Figure 4.4 Two-storey housing at Pope Francis Village

as we are still permitted [by the government] to stay here, we can keep our [transitional] houses even if we already had permanent housing units [at Pope Francis Village].

While Liza's and Nelia's aspirations embodied an impulse to change some aspects of their current circumstances, Julie's desire for the future was to maintain her community's ways of life in the face of changes introduced (or enforced) by the government's resettlement project. Although *balay nga bato* maintains its allure, her desires for her "dream house" were less potent relative to her desires for being able to stay where they were and to be free from worries about meeting the needs of her family. She re-appropriates – and indeed reinterprets – the idea of safety by regarding her "dream house" as an evacuation site. I asked her, "Where do you feel safest, here or at your relocation site?" To which she answered:

We all hope to be safe from harm ... [But] if we talk about safety, it is something we really can't know. Only God knows that. No matter how much you say that your house is really sturdy, only God can say when you will be taken away. If it's your time, it's your time. It's like that. Being safe really also depends on what the weather brings in [*depende sa panahon*, a metaphorical reference to uncertainty].

Politics of Possibility

Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted the ways in which specific aspirations for post-Yolanda recovery have been inscribed in the state's reconstruction program, most notably in its housing and resettlement initiatives. The governmental practices of *benevolent discipline* and *governing through women* constitute an assemblage of rule which essentially flattens the topography of the otherwise heterogeneous desires, aspirations, and life conditions of urban poor disaster survivors. Circulation of disgust for the squatter or desires for moral reformation and modernity aimed to mold people into particular forms of ethical subjects. Possibilities for recovery and self-becoming then seem limited *and* limiting when seen only through the tunnel vision of the state and other institutions.

I presented the three stories above to illustrate that aspirations – and the possibilities that arise from them – cannot be confined to the linear, seamless, and singular vision of “building back better.” Paying attention to women's pursuits of their dreams sheds light on the multiple ways they navigate their lives to achieve a sense of recovery. These hopeful pursuits are revealed through struggles for livelihoods, negotiations for better living arrangements, deployment of various forms of self-representations and re-appropriations (as “victim,” “volunteer,” “responsible,” or as part of the “community”), and reconstitution of caring bonds with others. In some cases, pursuits of certain gendered aspirations, such as ensuring the future of one's children as a “mother's dream,” can also require a *deferral* of other aspirations for oneself (Ahmed, 2010; Jakimow, 2016). Negotiating between aspirations and a pragmatic acknowledgment of what one is actually capable of achieving, can also lead to *aspirational compromise*. This is shown, for example, in the way Nelia, in the opening quote of her story, talks about forgoing her dream of having a house like “Camella Homes” and settling for the *balay nga bato* offered by the state – because that was, for her, the more realizable dream. All these navigations of post-disaster life are *entangled*, but not always fully aligned, with hegemonic ideals of the “good life.”

Traversing the terrains of recovery arise out of the complex interactions of diverse life conditions and histories, attachments to place, moral orientations, desires, engagements with state and non-state actors, gender norms and relations, and even things that happen by chance (*depende sa panahon*). This wide range of aspirational resources and groundings constitute entangled modes of becoming which are set in motion at this particular historical moment, mediated through encounters with *balay nga bato* (see Bennett, 2010).¹⁴ The contingent results of such encounters allow us to conceive of possibilities that may emerge alongside or contrary to the prescribed pathways of recovery. These multiple and interlaced workings of hopes and desires, therefore, can be regarded as “a site and spur of becoming” (to borrow from Gibson-Graham 2005, p. 132), that is, an opening for a politics of possibility.

Possibilities, as the term suggests, are indeterminate. Thus, the explorations presented here are necessarily limited and are at best illustrative. In this section, I deal centrally with the implications of entangled aspirations and contingent self-refashioning on disaster recovery by framing these processes of rebuilding as a politics of possibility. Possibility here is not deployed in a utopian sense. Inasmuch as possibilities for self-creativity and transformation are opened by one's pursuits of aspirations, so too are possibilities for remaining within conventional pathways (Ahmed, 2010; Berlant, 2011; Moore, 2011). As Moore (2011, p. 29) further qualifies “[h]opes, desires, and satisfactions are not necessarily liberatory, but they are human possibilities, conditions within which we find our possibilities, part of the strategies that ‘individuals in their freedom can use in dealing with each other.’”

Drawing on the stories of Liza, Nelia, and Julie, in engagement with other women's accounts, I highlight generative moments for (alternative) possibilities. These instances are spurred by acts of hope and by the reflections and actions that take place when hopes and fantasies begin to fray. Lesley Head (2016) refers to these reflective moments as “moments of rupture.” Using rupture as an analytical entry point for exploring the politics of possibility, I steer the discussion back to *balay nga bato*, as a site of fantasy-production; at the same time, I look at the emotional tensions that emerge in pursuit of entangled aspirations for a house of one's own. I highlight two such reflective moments where ruptures become most apparent in women's narratives: (1) the awareness of unfulfilled promises of the “good life”; and (2) the dissonances experienced with state narratives of care.

When Concrete Cracks



Figure 4.5 Entrance of Ridge View Park

This one, it looks beautiful, right? So beautiful. But if you live there, you will see that things are not so beautiful ... the houses here are not well-made. We had an earthquake recently. The walls began to crack. We all had to run outside. We feared that the house would collapse ... Sometimes we just laugh 'Yolanda didn't kill us but this house will when it falls on our heads.'

(Liza)

In the quote above, Liza was talking about how *balay nga bato* was not as sturdy as they were made to believe. The cracks she saw on the walls of their house after a number of mild to moderate earthquakes had struck the area destabilized the notion that they would be safe if they relocated to the north and lived in *balay nga bato*. As concrete bound together "the material and ideational promises" of modernity/resilience (Harvey, 2010, p. 32), the cracks and physical flaws of the house also become symbolic of the crumbling fantasies of the "good life." Thus, the conversations I have had with Liza and other women about the houses they lived in at the resettlement sites also gave way to expressions of frustrations and dissatisfactions over the living conditions they were facing.

Many of those I talked with indeed subscribed to the idea that *balay nga bato* was desirable, and that they wanted to live in villages that are "safer," "cleaner," and more "orderly." While some have variably refashioned themselves to their new lives in resettlement, embodying forms of responsibilities inculcated through various state interventions, there was also widespread uneasiness, discomfort, loneliness, and longings for a different way of being. This was at times explicitly expressed, like Liza who used specific words to describe her emotions: *feeling out of place*. But such sentiments are also often conveyed through (or together with) sighs, pauses, facial expressions, and tears.

Gemma, 18, a single parent, started to cry after one look at Figure 4.6. At first, I was concerned whether she was reliving a trauma from her experience of Yolanda. But after she composed herself, she talked about a different form of trauma she was currently living with:

It is more difficult here in the north because even if our house was only made of wood in San Jose, our family was whole ... my parents do not come home often because our source of livelihood is far, and I am left here alone. I am lonely, I almost never see them ... *Pakabuhi* [livelihood] is difficult here. There, if we have no *sura* [dish accompanying a rice meal], we can easily get vegetables from our surroundings. But since we came here, it has been very hard. Sometimes we just have to eat salt with our rice. Because we can't have vegetables grow on concrete.

Women who had moved to the government resettlement villages had pinned their hopes on the idea that government housing would "concretize" their dream for a house of their own. However, the fulfillment of this dream meant



Figure 4.6 A bird's-eye view of Cawayanville

that they gave up other valued aspects of home life which they aspired to maintain – connections to family, community, place, and livelihoods being the most significant among them. While these connections may be reconstructed, as partially demonstrated in Nelia's case, for many others, it introduced another layer of hardship and suffering.

What did relocating to a concrete village and living in a concrete house mean for those being resettled? To live in the village meant to no longer be branded as a squatter. They would be free from worries about eviction. Concrete walls welcomed them as renewed citizens who deserved respect rather than derision, but of course, only after going through a process of "self-enhancement" (Chapter 3). They became formal account holders of electricity connections. They bought mineral water for drinking (although not necessarily by choice). These were all indicators of the progress that came with the package of *balay nga bato*. However, as many later realized, one cannot live off concrete alone. As Nene, mother of four, and a widowed woman who lost her husband to the storm surges, poignantly stated, "We are always *gutom* [hungry] ... (gesturing toward the wall of her house) we have *balay nga bato*, but we cannot eat it."

Living in this concrete village depleted people's resources, their social connections, and, particularly for women, their time, and their bodies. Developing an awareness of exacerbated hardships in resettlement was, for many, a *moment of rupture*. Marivic (33, married mother of three), for example, narrated:

It seems now I have no time. I have so many things to do, from early morning to late at night. I don't have time for rest. There are times when I would really like to sleep during the day, but I cannot do it because I am always thinking about the things I need to do: fetch water, take care of children, do the laundry, clean, cook, and earn a living [from a small street-side eatery she sometimes operated in the evening] ... I get frustrated thinking that since I moved here, I have not been able to rest. I am always tired from working. But even if I am always tired, it's still very hard. Life is still very hard (*ang hirap pa rin ng buhay*)! I don't know why things are still not getting any better.

In *Cruel Optimism*, Lauren Berlant (2011) underscores how optimism functions to moor subjects to normative and conventional aspirations as a means of survival. Optimism becomes cruel, according to Berlant (2011, p. 1), "when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially." Thus, what arouses a sense of possibility actually makes the attainment of such possibility unrealizable. People nonetheless continue to attach themselves to such fantasies in order to maintain their proximity to the "good life," if only to make the present life more bearable.

In most cases, residents of resettled communities endeavored to preserve their affective attachments to normative constructs of the "good life," regardless of the adverse impacts relocation has had on their livelihoods. Liza, for example, said that although she was miserable where she was, she said she would accept a house at Ridge View Park if it were to be given to her because, "I suffered a lot here. I already put a lot of effort to live here. *Paninindigan ko 'yun* [I will stand by that decision]." These pronouncements seem to embody *cruel optimism* in the manner that I have interpreted Berlant's work. But do Liza's self-stylizations and navigations of everyday life in resettlement really only bind her to the "cruelty" of impossible possibilities?

Consider, for instance, Liza's constant search for opportunities to have her own house at the resettlement site separate from her uncle's. The various strategies she employs might not really lead her to actualize her aspirations or to achieve any radical transformation of life circumstances. But if we think about how she educated herself with the "ins-and-outs" of bureaucratic processes, learned how to deal with government personnel in trying to negotiate the acquisition of her own house, made connections with other community members during various "required" activities, and even developed friendships with other women – all of these will be useful resources in the future (in yet unknown ways) and could potentially contribute to opening other possibilities. To echo Biehl and Locke (2017, p. 20), "might even the cruelest of optimisms open out to something else?"

The ability of normative "good life" fantasies in tethering people to particular lifeways is undoubtedly powerful. Pursuits of aspirations within these cruel relations are seemingly self-defeating. However, they can also be generative in ways we do not expect or have not yet imagined, as aspirations can

also shift, change, and lead to “indeterminate outcomes” (Archambault, 2018; Conradie & Robeyns, 2013). I argue here that moments of rupture are critical to revealing this generative potential of aspirations. Indeed, as disaster survivors in resettlement villages began to experience *ruptures* in their idealized notions of *balay nga bato*, many have also sought to resolve the dissonances between realities and expectations by abandoning their *balay nga bato*, and the fantasies associated with it, in favor of pursuing other, and perhaps still emergent, dreams.

When Care Begets Suffering

Yearnings for a nurturing and caring state – one that is sensitive to the plight of the poor – are woven into people’s aspirations for recovery (see Aretxaga, 2003; Curato, 2017). “We hope for leaders who have *malasakit* [compassion], those who will listen to our concerns and help us,” an officer of a Homeowners Association told me during a community exhibit I held that highlighted the results of *PhotoKwento*. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, the provision of *balay nga bato* house that relocated informal settlers has been framed by the state as an act of benevolence – something that was done supposedly out of kindness. Aspirations for a better life were very much entangled with hopes for a state that would govern with care and compassion as it guided its constituents toward a “resilient” future.

For Nelia, being an officer of their Homeowners Association (HOA) provided her with a unique vantage point for observing state benevolence. She was both a housing beneficiary as well as part of an apparatus for governing. In some instances, she qualified the idea that the state was living up to expectations of providing care. Commenting on the intensified occupancy monitoring at the resettlement sites done by the government, she said, “The government is *naniningkamot* [doing its best] to provide for us. We were provided houses, so we should also do our part ... to take care of what the government has given us.” However, as she performed her duties as a HOA officer, she also witnessed the suffering of others, which affected her. This prompted her to reflect on her own role as an officer and how the government is falling short on its promise of care. Below, she recounts her experiences while conducting monitoring home visits:

When I go on monitoring and validation visits,¹⁵ I don’t just ask ‘how many females, how many males’ and then leave. I ask them about their problems and difficulties. Many of them really need someone who will listen to them ... Most of the people here are really struggling to survive. I feel pity for others, especially the old and the sick who really need support and can’t even buy medicines or food ... Sometimes, I would go to their houses and help them clean ... at one time, I really felt very bad about what I was seeing, I approached [a senior government field staff] and he said: ‘Ma’am, how could the government provide aid to these people who are most in need?’

Nelia's aspirations for community life, which she has often expressed in terms of her hopes for social cohesion and security of livelihoods, significantly frame her narratives of recovery. From the encounters above, Nelia's fantasies about a caring state started to fray, albeit gradually. She realized how resettlement had caused more hardships for the community with which she now identified. Her empathy for the plight of others led her to ask government staff to provide aid to those in need, for indeed, these were hardships that she too had experienced. Sometimes her intercessions worked and sometimes they did not. For example, at one point she was able to negotiate concessions for those who were unable to fulfill the requirements of sweat equity due to various circumstances. She proposed that they be allowed to occupy a house and render community service instead of sweat equity. In this case, Nelia tried to use her position as a HOA officer to open possibilities, within the limits of her abilities, for better living conditions for those in her community.

Maria, 36, married mother of five, was less forgiving than Nelia in her assessment of the state's performances of "care." Upon seeing the photograph in Figure 4.7, which is a tarpaulin streamer that bore Tacloban's tourism tagline: "Home of the Happiest People in the World," she said:



Figure 4.7 A tourism banner showcasing Tacloban as "Home of the Happiest People in the World"

Happy? I think they [referring to people in power] are the only ones who are happy because they have money. They wouldn't be smiling if they were poor like us. We were told *diri la bangon better* [not only rise up but be better], but there is still so much that we lack here (*damo pa it am kaku-langan*). Only when our needs are met and my children are given a good life, that is when I can say I am happy.

For Julie, however, the moment of rupture for these hopes for state compassion happened early in the process of rebuilding. After the traumatic experience of being caught in the storm surge, of watching people die, and of losing her home, the forced eviction that came after had inflicted more suffering on Julie and her family. "*Kinurot ang puso ko* [it was heart-wrenching]," Julie said. They had to ensure their own survival as humanitarian organizations were discouraged by the city government from providing aid to those in the no-build zones. This caused a momentary loss of hope, as expressed in Julie's words "we should have all just died."

However, it was also during these moments when Julie's community in Costa Brava was left to fend for themselves that they began to explore means by which community members could support each other. One community leader spoke of this experience, "*kung hindi tayo makakaasa sa tulong ng gobyerno, tayo na lang ang magtutungan* [if we cannot hope for assistance from the government, then we should just help ourselves]." With the assistance of the Urban Poor Associates, they organized their community, built temporary or transitional houses, and engaged in political activities to advance their rights to housing security and livelihood (such as conducting street demonstrations and sending a delegation of leaders to negotiate with city officials on matters related to housing). The possibilities opened by the state's withholding of housing assistance for those who wished to stay in the no-build zones was to a certain extent transformative for the community (more on this in Chapter 5). These were possibilities that had not even figured in their "collective horizons" prior to Yolanda (see Appadurai, 2004). When Julie said, "so this is what it means to be urban poor," she recast and reclaimed the label of "urban poor" as something positive and hopeful. This is in contrast to state attempts to urge housing beneficiaries to "discard the old self" by channelling contempt toward their former "urban poor"/"squatter" identities (see Chapter 3).

For Julie, in particular, these ruptures, reflections, and rekindling of hope in other forms of care relations led to changes in the ways she viewed herself and her relations with others. Working with other women in building transitional shelters led her to reflect on her capacities as a woman which she had not previously recognized. It also sparked a desire to be more involved in community affairs. As community members began to acknowledge her skills for the roles she had played in their organization, she started to dream of finishing school and getting a degree to further develop her skills. Thus, as she began to develop (new) dreams for herself, her aspirations were also imbricated with the collective aspirations of her community.

In *The Capacity to Aspire*, Appadurai (2004, p. 59) argues: “in strengthening the poor’s capacity to aspire ... the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty.” He stresses that structural conditions limit the aspirations of the poor and therefore limit the possibilities the poor are able to realize. By building the capacity to aspire, which I understand as enabling the creative (re-)imagining of future possibilities, the poor are able to exercise voice and agency to reshape the terms of engagement and recognition that had previously been defined by the state (Ibrahim, 2011). Through Julie’s story, we find that the moments of rupture triggered by the state’s refusal of on-site housing assistance drove agentic impulses toward an alternative future outside the logics and imaginings of Build Back Better. The broadening of individual and collective horizons, as an expression of the politics of possibility, enabled residents of Costa Brava to reinterpret notions of risk, safety and resilience – and in the process reclaim the label of “urban poor” as a site of becoming and transformation.

Although the experience of Costa Brava remains a minority when set against the larger social and institutional landscape of Tacloban’s reconstruction, it demonstrates the political potentials of hopes and aspirations to produce alternative pathways to recovery. Hence, even in the instances where possibilities seem contained within the line of vision allowed by hegemonic aspirations, such possibilities and forms of becoming are still never foreclosed but ever emergent.

Entanglement and Becoming

Disaster recovery entails assessing loss, and negotiating what needs to be reconstituted, rebuilt, or made better. But perhaps, more than anything, disaster recovery is about building futures which, in order to be realized, must first be imagined (Weiss, 2002). Therefore, the very act of imagining, of fantasizing about worlds *not-yet* or *what-could-be*, performs a central role in developing pathways for recovery. It is with this premise that I examined the ways in which aspirations served as a navigational capacity for pursuing hoped-for futures after a disaster.

My aim in this chapter was to demonstrate how hopes and aspirations have provided momentum, force, and potency to the critical task of forging possible lives after a catastrophe. I have shown how aspirations for recovery are shaped through the entanglement of multiple social and cultural resources and are animated by encounters with material things that served as signifiers of the “good life,” specifically *balay nga bato*. Such entanglements disclose the creation of possibilities and various modes of becoming which help us understand how and why women, and disaster-affected people more generally, regard and enact recovery in different ways. More importantly, it helps open and redirect our lines of vision toward alternatives.

By regarding aspirations as a site of becoming, pursuits for visions of disaster recovery can be viewed as an expression of a politics of possibility. As such, recovery is characterized not by the determinacies implied by technocentric and rationalist approaches but by contingency and open-endedness, shaped and reshaped by hopeful endeavors.

Possibilities, however, do not always promise transformative change. As shown in women's narratives, hegemonic ideals of modernity and good-life fantasies powerfully influence people's aspirations for the future and the ways they imagine their relations to themselves and to others accordingly. How people in the margins continue to cling on to attachments that undermine their flourishing reveals how the act of hoping and aspiring can also be cruel. Yet, not everything is as bleak as it appears.

As bell hooks (1990) famously argued, the margins are not merely a site of deprivation marked by hopelessness, despair, and unfulfilled dreams. The margins most importantly are a site of radical openness, a space in which life can be imagined otherwise. Viewing disaster recovery from the hopes and aspirations of those at the margins prompts us "to recognise that 'things could be otherwise' politically because they are already 'otherwise' discursively," empirically, and in the imaginations of the privileged and the powerful (Gibson-Graham, 2005, p. 142).

I used Head's (2016) concept of "rupture" to explore the political potentials of aspirations in enabling the articulation of non-conventional futures. While most moments of rupture have not led to radical shifts in the ways people worked toward recovery, they have shown how women are actively imagining and re-imagining recovery and re-constituting themselves in the process. Despite the numerous disappointments experienced as fantasies and dreams continued to crack, if not crumble, the constant search for possibilities also constitutes constant self-becoming. In the case of Costa Brava (Julie's story), however, I have shown how a moment of rupture inspired a community to pursue non-conventional recovery pathways. Broadening collective horizons beyond the affordances offered by the state and other aid actors showed how building communities' capacity to aspire can open possibilities for transformative changes.

Reconceptualizing recovery, then, as an open-ended process anchored in the ways that people navigate their circumstances, moved by their hopes and dreams for futures that may yet exist, and sustained through relationships of care, helps us to re-imagine resilience from the standpoint of the embodied, everyday, and emotional experiences of disaster survivors. It is this possibility for reframing our understanding of resilience, as drawn from women's experiences, that I turn to in the final empirical chapter of this book.

Notes

- 1 This story can be accessed at: <http://yolanda.neda.gov.ph/new-homes-renewed-life-for-yolanda-survivors/> (accessed August 24, 2020).
- 2 The original translation of this line as written on the website was "The roads are cemented, not bumpy or rocky. Our houses are concrete." I have provided my own translation of the text as the original Waray version actually presents a comparison between current and previous conditions as well as the disaster survivor's perception of what has changed as a result of resettlement.
- 3 The so-called disaster-resilient qualities of government housing, especially those administered by the National Housing Authority (NHA), were in fact a subject of

controversy. During my fieldwork, complaints about the substandard quality of houses being constructed were widespread. Many of the houses bore cracks from a recent earthquake. Some resettlement sites were also prone to flooding, including Ridge View Park.

- 4 The individual stories were chosen because they either exemplified prominent trends that arose out of the interviews or else are insightful because they exhibit non-conventionality.
- 5 Later, new rounds of housing applications would be called in order to ensure that housing units would be fully occupied. At the time of my fieldwork, housing beneficiaries had been abandoning or not regularly occupying the units that were awarded to them because of the distance of resettlement areas from their sources of livelihood.
- 6 Php 30 is roughly equivalent to 60 cents (US\$). The average daily earning of people residing in resettlement sites was about Php 250 (~US\$ 5). Therefore, spending 30 pesos for water takes up a substantial portion of their daily budget. At the time of fieldwork, most of the houses in the government resettlement sites did not have running water.
- 7 *Diskarte* is a key concept which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.
- 8 An exemplar of housing projects in the Philippines that require the observance of sweat equity are those implemented by *Gawad Kalinga*, which means “to give care” in Tagalog (see Kelly & Ortega, 2020). In the resettlement sites in Tacloban, beneficiaries of housing projects where sweat equity was required needed to render 500–700 hours of manual labor.
- 9 “Last two minutes” is an appropriation of a sports lingo, particularly basketball which is highly popular in the Philippines. The phrase “last two minutes” refers to the period of the game when the winner and loser are determined. It is thus a moment highly charged with thrill and anticipation.
- 10 Although “people-driven” is how the consortium prefers to call this initiative, I use the term “community-focused” to highlight the approach taken by the housing project which underscores the value of community organizing and mutual aid as a strategy for implementation.
- 11 Julie had talked about how part of her difficulties was having to reduce herself to “nearly begging” for shelter and food, which affected her sense of dignity and self-worth.
- 12 Among the claimants of the land are purportedly members of a powerful political clan which, at the time of this research, dominated the local politics in Tacloban.
- 13 UPA organizers I interviewed referred to this as “in-city relocation.” They were critical of the idea of relocating communities so far up north. According to one organizer, transport costs was a main consideration for choosing the resettlement site (not to exceed Php 18 for a return trip). In Tacloban North, people would spend up to Php 60 (roughly US\$1.20) on transport, which used a big portion of people’s daily budget (US\$1 = Php 48.2).
- 14 In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett (2010) regards what is imagined and imaginable as a product of one’s affective encounters with material objects. In this case, *balay nga bato* generates affective responses (such as longing and desire) and induces fantasies of the good life.
- 15 HOA officers assisted the city government in monitoring whether or not housing beneficiaries were complying with occupancy guidelines.

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5 Lived Resilience

Introduction

In “Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis,” Achille Mbembe and Janet Roitman (1995) provide a vivid account of practices of living with crisis in Cameroon in the early 1990s. Situated in historical moments marked by economic depression, structural adjustment, political instabilities, and botched development projects, Mbembe and Roitman provocatively detail how people continuously endeavored to construct a meaningful existence within, through, and despite the chronicity of crisis. Crisis, in their illuminations of the context of Cameroon, is not limited to a single disruptive event, although such an event may very well have triggered, amplified, or defined the contours of such crisis. Rather, Mbembe and Roitman treat crisis as *a lived experience*, that is, as circumstances and situations that blend into the banality of everyday life and which require new capacities for living and improvisation.

This work by Mbembe and Roitman is particularly insightful for reflecting on what it means to become “resilient” in the context of Tacloban’s attempts to Build Back Better – taking into account the embeddedness of already existing and continuously unfolding socio-ecological issues which Yolanda served to unveil and magnify. The precarious environments that disaster survivors confront were most certainly not simply a result of Yolanda. Disaster and subsequent recovery efforts are mapped onto social landscapes which are historically marked by urban power dynamics, gendered inequalities, dispossession, poverty, and marginalization – the very conditions which are seen to constitute disaster vulnerabilities (Bankoff & Hilhorst, 2004; Oliver-Smith, 2004; Pelling, 2003; Wisner, 2016). Nonetheless, despite these precarious conditions and experiences of marginalization, the women I have worked with have – in their own ways – learned to navigate, improvise, and “weave their existence” (Mbembe & Roitman, 1995) into the uncertain and often pain-filled but also hopeful terrains of disaster recovery. Through inventive reconfigurations of everyday (post-disaster) life, women “recapture the possibility of self-constitution” (Mbembe & Roitman, 1995, p. 325), thus shaping their worlds, aspirations, and embodied dispositions toward a future that is not fore-closed but ever-becoming. Thus, in this chapter, I return to the provocation I set forth in the Introduction: *what possibilities for re-imagining resilience might women’s experiences of recovery reveal?*

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In Chapter 1, I elaborated how critics of the concept of resilience and its applications in contemporary societies have problematized the ways in which resilience tends to depoliticize social differentiations, obscure power relations, and elide issues of justice in favor of technocentric planning (Fainstein, 2015; Harris et al., 2017; Harrison & Chiroro, 2016). Among the most compelling arguments advanced by such critics is how resilience, in its current deployment, is fundamentally neoliberal, specifically in terms of how it assigns responsibilities away from the state and onto communities, households, and individuals – a phenomenon often referred to as responsabilization. Moreover, from a feminist perspective, resilience has all too often been built on the backs of women who primarily bear the responsibilities of providing care during times of hardship, crisis, and calamity.

I am largely sympathetic with these views as, in many ways, this notion of resilience as a form of neoliberal governmentality and as a device that perpetuates the feminization of responsibility in disaster contexts has figured prominently in this research (see Chapters 2 and 3). I agree with these accounts that dominant practices of resilience-building tend to produce projects of managing “deficient/vulnerable subjects” through a range of disciplinary and governmental mechanisms of rule – rendering technical the otherwise complex realities of everyday existence (also, in my earlier work Albuero-Cañete, 2014; Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991; 1995; Li, 2011). But I view this as only one side to the story of Tacloban’s reconstruction.

Viewed solely in the manner presented above, it seems that resilience is fated to be nothing more than a “rhetorical device” (Tanyag, 2018) that serves as a euphemism for neoliberalism, or a fuzzy concept that covers up actually existing inequalities in favor of the status quo. These constructions of resilience make it fundamentally hostile to sustainability and equity imperatives (see Neocleous, 2013) – leaving little room for contingency, much less optimism. Yet, from my engagements with women in Tacloban, what emerges are narratives of hope despite the trauma, of improvisation despite the seeming bleakness of life in resettlement, of possibilities rather than foreclosures. Where do these fantasies, embodied labors of hope, multiple self-stylizations, and acts of care figure in these constructions of resilience-as-neoliberal? It is apparent that despite attempts to produce responsible urban citizens through various technologies of power, discussed in previous chapters, there remains a persistent reimagining of, longing for, and endeavoring to attain other worlds that *may yet* exist (Harcourt & Nelson, 2015b; Moore, 2011; Wichterich, 2015). From women’s narratives of recovery, there is no simple antagonism between government-enforced displacements and their responses to them: women qualify inasmuch as they resist the embedded (neoliberal) ethics and rationalities of rule that inform resettlement; they weave such conjunctions and disjunctions into their daily fantasies and struggles for a good life; they move in and out of different forms of vulnerability and precarity; and, more importantly, they create openings for new ways of being – regardless of whether or not these dissolve or solidify into transformative outcomes. How might we apprehend conceptually the powerful influences that dominant/neoliberal modes of thinking and

resilience-building have on identity formation, subjectivities, and world-making – while refusing to diminish people to the workings of such forces?

I argue that we can demand more from the concept of resilience beyond the determinacies implied in accounts of resilience as merely neoliberal governmentality or as a tool for dispossession (Rose & Lentzos, 2017; Zeiderman, 2016). If we are to start from the assumption shared by multiple and even contesting frameworks, which conceive of resilience as “an integrated system in which the well-being of all parts is intricately connected” (Vale, 2014, p. 196; see also Cote & Nightingale, 2012), it becomes possible to think of resilience broadly as a project of improving life circumstances in the face of risk, uncertainty, and unpredictability (Anderson, 2010). Such a project of improvement and well-being, while often annexed by modernist and neoliberal rationalities and modes of governing, cannot be wholly characterized or attributed to being “neoliberal” but can in fact sustain practices that could contradict neoliberalism (DeVerteuil & Golubchikov, 2016). The undertaking to achieve betterment may very well “arise spontaneously out of collective bonds of caring” (Rose & Lentzos, 2017, p. 45), as well as individual improvisations to address situations of adversity. As Mbembe and Nuttall (2008, p. 25) remind us, processes of urban change and adaptation always “outpace the capacity of analysts to name them.” Thus, a rethinking of resilience as at friction with but not necessarily contained within neoliberal modernist projects is, I contend, a more fruitful way of charting the increasingly risky terrains that cities of the Global South like Tacloban confront in contemporary times (Tsing, 2005).¹

Taking inspiration from the work of Mbembe and Roitman (1995), I offer an alternative conception of resilience as *lived* – focusing not on totalizing explanations of what resilience is, does, and maintains, but rather on the plurality of means for navigating, imagining, and adapting to the indeterminacies, the “unfinishedness,” and contingencies of life in the face of precarity and the unknown (Biehl & Locke, 2017). As such, resilience can be regarded more as an iterative endeavor rather than as an outcome which must either be embraced or resisted (Cretney, 2017; Harris et al., 2017; Lenette et al., 2012). I thus conceptualize *lived* resilience as comprising a *life project* (borrowing from Escobar, 1998; 2008) enacted through the multiple and shifting ways people imagine relationships to themselves, others, their communities, their environment, the cosmos – and the associated care responsibilities and affects embedded within these relationships. As constitutive of a life project, the emphasis of lived resilience is not so much on the need to control risks, manage future uncertainties, and arrest vulnerabilities, but rather on the ability of people to inhabit, (re)shape, and mend one’s world in order for life to flourish in the face of, and *despite*, uncertainties.

In what follows, I discuss the dimensions of a proposed framework for lived resilience and how these have emerged from women’s narratives of disaster recovery. Drawing insights from feminist political ecology, I highlight how these dimensions are situated in everyday, embodied, and emotional practices and relations (Harris, 2015; Shah et al., 2017) which constitute what we might

call *ethical imaginaries of recovery*. By ethical imaginaries of recovery, I am adopting Henrietta Moore's concept of ethical imagination, which she defines as the "forms and means through which individuals imagine their relations to themselves and to others" (Moore, 2016). As both a mechanism and a process of connecting the self to the world, the ethical imagination can be construed as ways of "experiencing, thinking, feeling, and living" these relationships (Moore, 2016). Ethical imaginaries of recovery, then, work to animate and (re)configure desires, practices, and ideologies that contribute to organizing people's worlds and open possibilities for other forms of futures. I argue that reclaiming resilience from the standpoint of lived experience – especially of those who are regarded as *vulnerable* – can serve to disrupt "the powerful circuits of knowledge" rooted in Western neoliberal/modernist rationality and ethics and become a means to contribute to decolonizing knowledge and resilience practice within broader development thinking (Shah et al., 2017, p. 401). I conclude with how the idea of lived resilience re-centers epistemologies of the vulnerable as a critical starting point for intellectual, ethical, and political undertakings toward imagining and enacting alternative futures.

According to Kothari and Arnall (2019, p. 132), a focus on everyday life as a means for understanding environmental change provides powerful insights to illuminate how "nature" and "society" are intimately connected and sustained on a day-to-day basis. However, precisely because of its mundaneness and unremarkableness, the everyday tends to get neglected, as it is often regarded as "less relevant ... to the grand task of understanding broad forces of change within fields ... [of] climate and sustainability sciences" (Kothari & Arnall 2019, p. 131). Building on Kothari and Arnall's argument on the need to re-center everyday life in analyses of socio-environmental change, I identify dimensions of lived resilience drawn from the routines, rhythms, and flows of daily experiences of women as they navigate the intricacies of disaster recovery. In what follows, I focus on at least three mutually constitutive dimensions in my formulation of lived resilience: (1) the *routinized improvisations* in the face of precarity and adversity; (2) the *relationality* of resilience; and (3) the centrality of a *feminist ethics of care*.

Routinized Improvisation: The Arts of *Diskarte*

If you don't know how to use your *diskarte*, you won't survive. There are many things around you that you can use so that you won't go hungry. *Diskarte ka lang* [just use your *diskarte*].

(Annie, 24, married, mother of two)

Diskarte is a Filipino term that is commonly used in everyday conversation to denote the capabilities that one needs to employ in order to get by or, in some instances, to get ahead. The meaning of *diskarte* varies according to context: resourcefulness, flexibility, street smarts, problem-solving, and the ability to take advantage of opportunities (Morales, 2017). Although not fully explored in anthropological and psychological studies in the Philippines, *diskarte* is a disposition that figures prominently in narratives of survival (see, for example, Lasco, 2018).



Figure 5.1 People make a living by selling a variety of goods

Every morning, Marivic, 33, gets up and prepares her children for school. She counts her daily budget carefully, making sure she gives *baon* [allowance] to her children and still has enough money to take care of the family's needs throughout the day. As with many women at the government resettlement sites, Marivic's husband is often away fishing for long periods of time. Although without formal employment, Marivic engages in various economic activities to augment family income: as a member of a water distribution cooperative, she takes the morning shift selling water from a tank to residents in the village (Php 2 per 20-litre container);² in the afternoon, she watches over a community rice-retailing enterprise; and, being a gifted cook, she sometimes runs a pop-up eatery on the street near her house at night. Apart from that, Marivic is also an officer of their Homeowners Association and actively participates in the required community activities to maintain her occupancy at the resettlement village. "How do you manage to do all these things?" I asked her. She responded, "You do what you can to get by (*para makaraos*). Life is difficult here. You need to have *diskarte* and find ways to meet your family's needs."

It soon became evident that the idea of *diskarte* was central to how women coped with the issues resulting from resettlement. In my interview with Sally, 60, I asked, "How have you dealt with difficulties (*kakurian*) here at the resettlement site?" Sally then replied:



Figure 5.2 A sari-sari store in a resettlement site

I manage through my own efforts (*sariling pagsisikap*). When there is nothing to eat, I don't just stare out into space (*nakatunganga lang*) ... I tried my best to open my own sari-sari store [neighborhood grocery shop] ... (flips through album and points at Figure 5.2) like this one. Many of us received livelihood [support] from the government. They gave us goods like shampoo, soap, snacks, to sell at our stores. Not all stores survived though, many stores closed. If everybody was selling the same thing, then it was very difficult to compete because you had nothing else to offer. They asked me, how have I managed to keep my store running when so many have closed down? They just don't know the kinds of difficulties I dealt with ... I was able to get loans from "5-6" [moneylenders],³ I bought goods that others were not selling, I made my own *sampalok* candy [tamarind candy], and made sure I set aside enough to pay off the daily collections. When [the government] thought that I was managing my business well, they gave more [support] for my store. But it was actually just all debt (laughs)! *Diskarte*. You need *diskarte* so you can survive. If you wait for the heavens to help you, you will grow old and still have nothing. Before I go to sleep, I already think about what I need to do in order to get by the next day. *Kailangan palaging dumiskarte* [you need to always practice *diskarte*].

While much of resilience discourses revolve around building capacities to absorb the shocks and stresses of extraordinary events like Yolanda, the references to *diskarte* here draw attention to the daily routines that women carry

out in their ordinary environments and their attempts to gain more direct control over their lives. When Sally said, “I don’t just stare out into space,” she implies an imperative to take efficacious action to address a problem. The efficacious action one takes might not always be evaluated as “good” in public moral registers, such as dealing with exploitative moneylenders. But in the context of the Philippines, taking money from loan sharks is a normal and oftentimes necessary practice, especially among those running micro-businesses and informal enterprises in the absence of accessible institutional support and opportunities for formal credit (Kondo, 2003; Recio, 2019). In both Sally’s and Marivic’s narratives, the broader backdrop of Yolanda blends into the actual and mundane realities that women now face on a day-to-day basis as part of their responsibilities: making a living, household budgeting, managing debt and dealing with debtors, taking advantage of opportunities (in the form of government programs, for example), and planning for the next day.

The notion of *diskarte* as expressed above has resonances with Michel de Certeau’s (2008) idea of “making do.” In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, for example, de Certeau speaks of the ways in which individuals employ various tactics and strategies – using the “details of everyday life” – as an exercise of their agency or, as de Certeau puts it, as a form of “consumption” of one’s culture. Thus, to exhibit *diskarte* is to approach the post-disaster condition from the vantage point of the commonplace: marked by the routinization of improvisations rather than as an extraordinary response to a spectacular event. Within the framework of lived resilience, *diskarte* may be viewed as a way of “making do” or, more specifically, as a *creative repurposing of everyday life* (Grove, 2018).

However, there is another facet of *diskarte* beyond the tactical navigation of everyday conditions. This is the acknowledgment that one is constantly confronting situations of uncertainty, precarity, and vulnerability – conditions which provide the very basis for the need to be inventive. Cherry, 40, a married mother, gives the following account:

I used to be a beneficiary at [a resettlement village]. But it was too far. We could not make a living there. My husband got sick, so it became more difficult for us to get by because we could not earn enough income. Not even enough to buy rice. So, we started living in two places. One here at the danger zone and another at the resettlement. I would sell my barbecue here, and we would go back to [the village] every now and then. We would have nothing to eat if I couldn’t sell my barbecue because my husband was sick ... But since we could not go back to the [village] regularly, [the government] took back the house that they gave us and had someone else live in it. Of course, I was angry! Why would they let someone else occupy a house that already had an occupant? My heart was heavy (*naguol akong dughan*) because I spent 500 hours [of sweat equity] on that house. I spent hard-earned money on transportation just to render those hours of work on the house. I even got sick with *trangkaso* [flu or flu-like illness] a couple of times because of the work. They could not understand that I needed to

earn because my husband could not work. But they still took away our house. We became squatters again ... but then I heard that Pope Francis [Village] had some spots available and they were offering these to residents of the neighborhood [where we lived] ... I volunteered in community clean-ups, participated in community savings schemes, and I even joined rallies ... so that I could get a place. We needed to be active in the community so we could be part of Pope Francis. I enjoyed doing things together with others ... So that's how I got to be part of Pope Francis. *Swerte ug diskarte* [luck and *diskarte*].

In Cherry's story, her efforts to maintain a living and a roof over their heads are undertaken in an environment where various forms of insecurities and anxieties are produced and imbricated: dealing with illness in the family, inaccessibility of livelihood opportunities, threatened occupancy status at the resettlement village (and eventually being evicted), and future uncertainties of once again becoming squatters in the face of ongoing demolitions of informal settlements along coastal danger zones. These situations of precarity prompted Cherry to use her *diskarte* in order to address her family's needs.

Saddled by the responsibility to care for her young son and her ailing husband, Cherry takes on the role of breadwinner and seeks to ensure her family's survival. Although Cherry's strategy of "living in two places" would garner her the derogatory title of being an "absentee owner," or worse, a "*pasaway*" [troublemaker] – labels which had steadily become part of the disciplinary lexicon in resettlement villages – it was, for her, the only means by which she could get around stringent occupancy regulations and earn an income. And Cherry certainly is not alone in employing this form of *diskarte*. Beneficiaries establishing dual residences have been a great source of "headache" (*sakit sa ulo*) for government officials. Such situations have compelled the city government to undertake a cat-and-mouse game with so-called "hard-headed" beneficiaries (*matigas ang ulo*), with parties employing different strategies to outsmart the other.⁴ For example, the latter would leave the lights on in the empty houses to feign occupancy, while the former would conduct night "monitoring visits" to see if occupants were actually at home. The latter would ask other non-family members to stay in the houses while they were away. Meanwhile, the former would deploy Homeowner Associations to verify the identities of housing occupants, and so on. Cherry, however, was one of those who eventually got caught and was made an example of – through the revocation of the housing award. This placed Cherry in a vulnerable position, which led her to once again use her *diskarte* to seek other options to attain housing and economic security. This opportunity presented itself through the housing project at Pope Francis Village.

What is interesting in Cherry's account was not only her reference to the notion of *diskarte* as important to her family's survival, but also the idea of *swerte* or luck. Oftentimes, study participants used the phrase "*depende sa panahon*" [it depends on the weather] or "*weather-weather lang*," expressions

that denote dealing with uncertainties that changes in the weather might bring, metaphorically speaking. Invoking the idea of *swerte* brings in the element of chance to the practice of *diskarte* – depending on what the tides, the rain, the cosmos, would send your way. Thus, routinized improvisations are also attentive to the unknown – rendering the forms these take and their consequences as always open-ended. An acknowledgment of this open-endedness of *diskarte* directs our attention to the unpredictability of human agency, as well as its capacity to shift to new forms of *diskarte* should “the weather” require it. In a way, *diskarte* may also be understood as a form of risk-taking rather than risk aversion, the latter being a value which the state had strived to inculcate in its citizens through various affective technologies of recovery (Chapter 2). In sum, living in the post-disaster context entails producing and reconfiguring certain types of ethos that are attuned to the pragmatic and shifting demands of surviving and thriving under conditions of vulnerability (Grove, 2018).

In this discussion of *diskarte* as a situated and embodied practice of resilience, it is important to highlight two caveats. First, it is easy to romanticize *diskarte* as a brimming well of resourcefulness in the face of the symbolic and material injustices with which people live on a daily basis. Indeed, *diskarte* can very well lend itself to neoliberal ethics and rationality that regard the resilient subject as self-sufficient and therefore responsible for their own survival (Bracke, 2016). Thus, it is important not to lose sight of the broader political economy and forms of structural violence that disaster survivors actually experience in their daily lives and which serve to erode the poor's already dwindling resources (de la Rocha, 2001; Su & Tanyag, 2019).

It would seem too totalizing to assume, however, that just because these micro-practices of improvisations may not necessarily rest outside the imaginaries of neoliberal ethics they cannot be a source of counter-conducts, resistances, or active positionings – seen, for example, in the ways housing beneficiaries evade efforts to discipline them (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Butler, 2016; Cooper, 1997; Foucault, 1991; Mahmood, 2001; Scott, 1987). In other words, *diskarte* has also been a means by which women and other residents of resettlement villages have expressed everyday resistance. It also does not mean that acts of *diskarte* cannot have generative potential for new forms of affective relations, solidarities, and ways of being – even in minute and unanticipated ways (Biehl & Locke, 2017). This is illustrated in Cherry's story of re-attaching herself to another community when her house at the resettlement village was taken away, which opened opportunities for different experiences and social relations in a new village – and reshaped her relationship with the state. In other words, not all enactments of *diskarte* might be transformative, but they indicate an embodied struggle for attaining imagined futures, which may or may not materialize. Even though broader social and political systems might (consistently) fail people and render their hopes for a desired life as seemingly futile (Berlant, 2011), these struggles nonetheless indicate an affirmation of life which stubbornly refuses to be resigned to the inevitability of failure.

Second, while *diskarte* may be seen as an exercise of one's agential capacity, it is played out and embedded in complex webs of relationships. To be able to

use “the details of everyday life” (de Certeau, 2008), for example, one needs to learn how to traverse vertical and horizontal social relationships. In Sally’s narrative, she demonstrated cunning in finding ways to sustain her livelihood where others have not been so successful. But this entailed developing relationships with moneylenders and with government personnel who facilitated livelihood programs, as well as fostering a regular clientele in order to ensure the survival of her *sari-sari* store. Moreover, to mitigate precariousness, one might need to develop safety nets which, in the Philippine context, often come in the form of kinship and social support groups (Shah et al., 2017) in the absence of adequate social provisioning and welfare assistance. Lastly, improvisation requires attunement not only to social relationships but also to ecological and even spiritual connections which constitute the environments (or worlds) one must navigate in order to make do. Thus, lived resilience is marked by routinized improvisation but is also essentially relational.

Relationality of Resilience: Through the Lens of *Pakabuhi*

We try to find ways to earn a living here, but there is not much that we can do. The government provides livelihood [programs] ... but it is difficult for many of us to leave the sea, it is where our *pakabuhi* [livelihood] is.

(Leni, 24, married mother of three)



Figure 5.3 A man preparing his *lambat* or fishing net for another day at sea. Like many, he is separated from his family so that he could be nearer to the sea upon which their livelihood depends.

In recent years, economic and livelihood recovery has been regarded as a vital component of “resilient” disaster recovery processes (Joakim & Wismer, 2015). The Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery of the World Bank, for instance, underscores the imperative for repairing or replacing people’s economic assets in order to assist communities most affected by disaster to build back not only *better*, but also faster, stronger and more inclusively (Hallegatte et al., 2018). In Tacloban’s reconstruction, revitalizing community economies has been one of the key result areas identified in its recovery and rehabilitation plan (TACDEV, 2014, p. 41):

There is also a need to regenerate community economies to provide supplemental sources of income and livelihood to poor families. Community-based interventions may be most appropriate to provide sufficient economic and social safety nets to cushion any adverse effects of possible slow recovery; provide the stimulus for sustained economic activity at the community level; spur investments and physical development in the respective communities. In coordination with local and international NGOs, including bilateral agencies with extensive experience in community development, community mobilization and community organization programs will be launched. Skills, workforce development and livelihood training programs will be conducted including value[s] formation. Micro enterprises will be promoted and supported with micro credit facilities.

Amidst all the programs that were being provided by different state and non-state actors, it seemed that livelihood remained one of the most intractable issues of reconstruction, along with housing and relocation. More than five years after the disaster, study participants continued to lament the lack of livelihood in resettlement and how they were growing hungrier by the day, often saying: *life is harder here*. *Sari-sari* stores which were supported by the capital assistance livelihood program were jokingly called *sara-sara* stores (“sara” means to close down). In one of our conversations about livelihood, Nelia commented:

The government gave sewing machines to people who did not use them (Figure 5.4) ... they gave all kinds of livelihood trainings, like manicure and pedicure, but not everyone wants to do that! Many find no use for the trainings because there are also no opportunities to apply [what people learned from] the trainings ... At one instance, there was a distribution of fishing gear. But look around! Where is the sea (laughs)?⁵

As I talked more with people in the communities, I began to notice the differences between the way they used the term “livelihood” (in English) and *pakabuhi* (“livelihood” in the local Waray language).⁶ When they spoke about “livelihoods,” they usually pertained to various forms of livelihood assistance and programs provided by the government, NGOs, or other private donors. However, when they talked about their *pakabuhi*, they spoke about making a living or, more aptly, sustaining life (“*para mabuhi*”) – often invoking their connectedness to people, places, the environment, and even the weather.



Figure 5.4 Sewing machines were distributed as part of the government's livelihood projects

In Chapter 4, for example, I highlighted how Julie, who hailed from the community of Costa Brava in San Jose, Tacloban, refused government relocation, stating adamantly, “our *pakabuhi* is here.” To her understanding, regaining, reconstituting, and sustaining their *pakabuhi* were more than just having “assets” repaired or replaced, or being given new skills to undertake kinds of work that were divorced from their own experiences of making a living. When she said, “we are a fishing community,” she invoked how *pakabuhi* rested on their relationship to the sea, to the community, and their ways of life. Unlike assets and capital and entrepreneurialism, that many livelihood interventions emphasized, *pakabuhi* for Julie was not something one can easily replace or transplant. Therefore, while “livelihood” programs were focused on asset provision, restoration, and upgrading, people’s references to livelihood as *pakabuhi* went beyond the material outcomes and capitalist values that such programs endeavored to produce. Rather, *pakabuhi* accentuated the importance of relationships and interdependencies to supporting and sustaining lifeways.

Using the lens of *pakabuhi*, I underscore the significance of a relational ontology in my construction of *lived* resilience. A relational ontology is based on the recognition that our lives are intimately intertwined with the lives of others (Hanrahan, 2015; Tong, 1993). Specifically, my understanding of the relationality of resilience draws inspiration from Dianne Rocheleau’s (2015; 2016) theory of “rooted networks.” Rooted networks is a conceptual framework that seeks “to understand relationships between people and places, recognizing how power and culture are infused within networks that are rooted in place” (Harcourt, 2017, p. 1009). It does

so by making visible how people conceptualize their relationships to places and non-human entities that co-constitute their living worlds – a worldview which Donna Haraway (2008) refers to as *naturecultures* (more on this below). Taking off from Rocheleau's rooted networks theory, I demonstrate the relationality of resilience below by highlighting the forms of relationships prominent in women's narratives which have been crucial to their *pakabuhi* in the post-disaster context: (1) relationship to nature and the environment; and (2) social relations.

Relationship to Nature and the Environment

During the image generation process of PhotoKwento, I was intrigued by how a substantial number of photographs did not focus on people but rather on particular places, objects, and environments which study participants found meaningful. Many of these photographs bore images of the sea, the built environment (the Tacloban Astrodome, houses, infrastructure that sheltered them during Yolanda, ruins, and so on), objects (such as boats), plants, seashells, and even dogs. These kinds of photographs also elicited powerful memories and emotions from those I interviewed. For example, the photo of a bucket full of *punaw*, a local species of clam, generated much interest, excitement, and nostalgia among study participants (Figure 5.5):

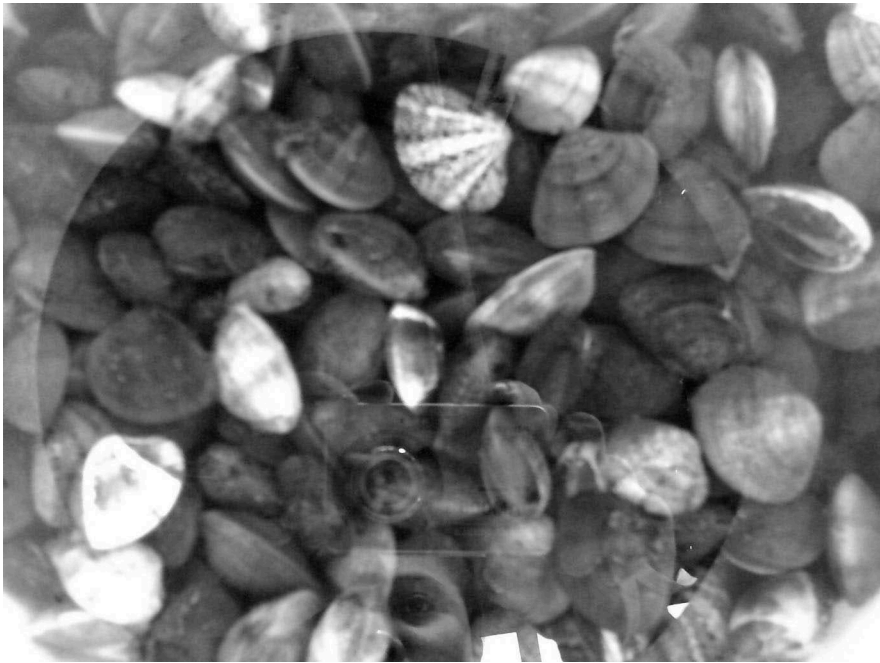


Figure 5.5 A bucket of *punaw* freshly gleaned from the shore during low tide

This is *punaw*! (exclaims excitedly) I'm sure this is from San Jose, right? We often gathered *punaw* back then. We could fill an entire bucket with this! You know what, my children really miss this. I would cook this in different ways, *adobo* [traditional dish cooked with soy sauce, vinegar and garlic], *baduya* [fritters], *sinigang* [sour soup]. So many things you could do with *punaw* ... We don't really have this anymore. You need to spend money for everything you need here. But when we were in San Jose, we could just go to the sea to get *punaw* when we had no money to buy food.
(Patty, 32, married mother of two)

The photograph of *punaw* led many study participants to reflect on life before relocation. What is most apparent is the role that *punaw* and other forms of sustenance provided by the sea and the land had in their pursuits for *pakabuh*. Their sense of loss was not only for people and homes taken away by Yolanda, but also for the ways of life made possible through their intimate relations with the environment.

In her book, *When Species Meet*, Donna Haraway (2008) introduces the concept of *naturecultures* which she uses to emphasize how “nature” and “culture” actively co-create each other in a diversity of contexts (Escobar, 1998; 1999; see also Harcourt & Nelson, 2015a). She challenges the binaries of nature and culture in modernist thinking and instead presents both as constitutive and non-hierarchical. This view allows us to think of human life as entangled with other forms of life, so that an exploitation of nature can be seen essentially as an exploitation of oneself and impacting adversely on one's health and well-being (Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018). I find Haraway's notion of *naturecultures* useful in understanding people's relationship with the environment in post-Yolanda Tacloban.

Survivors of Yolanda have a complicated relationship with the sea. While not all study participants relied on fishing, their ways of life, in one way or another, had connections to the sea – whether it served as a source of subsistence, generated livelihoods auxiliary to fishing, provided recreation, or offered a space (or “listening ear”) for people to vent their emotions.⁷ It was both welcoming and menacing, especially during the typhoon season when fishing activities became seriously affected. This was, however, part of the normal rhythms of life (Bankoff, 2003). After Yolanda, this relationship drastically changed. What used to sustain life now brought death and suffering to thousands. Photographs of the sea generated highly emotive responses from study participants (Figure 5.6). They often expressed their ambivalences toward relocating far from the sea: they were afraid, but they longed to go back; the sea took away loved ones and homes, but it also held memories of those who perished and the lives they led before Yolanda.

While state discourses emphasized the hazardousness of living near the sea, women were telling a story of how people's carelessness resulted in abuses to nature, and Yolanda was simply nature's vengeance. For example, Merlinda, 38, and a Yolanda widow, said:



Figure 5.6 A bare shoreline in San Jose. This used to be a densely populated settlement before Yolanda struck.

One thing you could see as Yolanda was going through Tacloban was all the garbage that came in. There was so much garbage coming from the sea! It was so dirty. People had become really careless, dumping their wastes into the ocean. It was as if the sea got mad and returned all that garbage to us. *Nagdulot din ng kamatayan ang basura* [the garbage also contributed to the deaths]. That place [referring to Figure 5.6], it used to be so cramped and people just made it dirty. The sea cleaned it up. It was like it took revenge on us (*naghihiganti*).

In this narrative, the sea is bestowed affective qualities: it was an angry and vengeful being. This vengefulness is seen as a result of people's inability to fulfill their responsibilities within this symbiotic relationship – an act of “carelessness” which produced a disastrous consequence.⁸ Human activities, such as dumping of garbage into open water and over-fishing leading to declining fish catch, were perceived to strain this relationship with the sea over time. Inattentiveness to obligations to care for the environment therefore helped brew the wrath of the cosmos which materialized as Yolanda. The state's declaration of “danger zones” after Yolanda advanced reinforced the notion that remaining near the coast was fostering a dangerous liaison with the sea, and that, indeed, the water was now something to be feared.

While communities under the state-initiated resettlement program confronted challenges of moving to new environments and building new livelihoods in Tacloban North, the communities who remained in San Jose (beneficiaries of

the Pope Francis Village housing project), grappled to make sense of their changing relationship with the sea. As they continued living at the coast, they are every day reminded of the temperaments of nature, with Yolanda still fresh in their memory. In an interview with one of the Pope Francis Village beneficiaries, Rita, 56, recounted how she witnessed the sea take away her mother who had been living with her. After her mother died, Rita said she did not want to see the ocean or even go near it. “We used to swim in the sea, ever since I was little. We would get shellfish to eat for supper or trade *alimasag* [a species of crab]. But after Yolanda, I did not want to even look at it,” she said.

As part of the psychosocial interventions facilitated through the Manila-based NGO Urban Poor Associates (UPA), which worked with the community after Yolanda, Rita participated in activities that sought to help them deal with their grief. In one of these activities, Fr. Roberto Reyes, popularly known in the country as the activist “running priest,” gathered about 30 survivors from Rita’s community and helped them “mend” their relationship with the sea:

We all gathered in a circle, waist-deep in the sea. We spent an hour in the water. We totally submerged [our bodies] and when we came back up, [Fr. Reyes] asked us ‘How are you feeling?’ At first, we said, we felt like drowning, we felt afraid. We were all crying. But he would come to the center of the circle, talk to us, approach us individually and prayed with us. ‘*Lumubog tayo ulit*’ [let’s submerge again]. We prayed so we could get over our fears together. Later we offered flowers to the sea. We said prayers for our loved ones who perished. I lit a candle for my mother ... I still keep thinking about my mother. But I am no longer afraid of the sea.

In contrast to official techno-scientific explanations of how the disaster happened, women made sense of Yolanda in relational terms. Their narratives marked the processes of affective detachments and re-attachments to the environment. Recovery, especially for those who remained in the so-called danger zones, required “making peace” with the sea which they acknowledged as vital to their *pakabuhì*. In Rita’s story, making peace was not simply a cognition of one’s ongoing connection to the environment. It was a highly affective experience: making peace required submerging her body in the water to overcome her fears and repair her damaged relationship with the sea.

In the Philippines, as elsewhere, forces of nature are often regarded as acts of God. Thus, experiences of “nature’s wrath” are also directly implicated in the need to strengthen the relationship with the Divine.⁹ As Marcia, 54, stated:

when you are at the point of death, of hardship, you need to pray to God. You need to be kind to others and follow God’s will ... God will help you. *Waray gud nim iba nga dadaupan kundi it Ginoo nga nga makakuan ka hit im kinabuhì* [you have no one else to turn to but God so that you can get by in your life].

According to Greg Bankoff (2004, p. 97), along with endowing nature with personal traits and qualities, “religious mysticism ... pervades contemporary life in the Philippines,” such that protection from the forces of nature and subsequent recovery from calamity are often seen as requiring divine providence and intervention. Thus, in Rita’s experience above, reconciling with the environment was mediated by a religious ritual of collective prayer and commemoration of departed loved ones.

In the literature on disaster recovery, addressing people’s “place attachment,” “sense of place” or “place-based identities” is often recognized as important to the pursuit of resilience (Oliver-Smith, 1996; 2010; Shah et al., 2017; Zetter & Boano, 2010). I underscore how place or the local environment is not simply an inert background where people’s livelihoods – deployed in a broad sense beyond income generation – occur (Harcourt, 2017; Harcourt & Escobar, 2002; Harris, 2015; Rocheleau, 2015). Using Haraway’s (2008) idea of *naturecultures* and Rocheleau’s rooted networks, *lived resilience* can be understood as produced through the intimate and affective entanglements of human and non-human actants (including the Divine), within place-based socio-ecological systems (Herman, 2015; Shah et al., 2017; Theriault, 2017).

Social Relations

Current iterations of community resilience emphasize social capital as a fundamental element of raising people’s adaptive capacities in the face of risk (Bankoff, 2007; Norris et al., 2008; Sherrieb et al., 2010; Twigg, 2007). Across the international development field, social capital, as advanced by sociologist Robert Putnam (1993; 2000), is widely regarded as forms of collectivity defined by norms of trust and reciprocity. These trust-based social networks are considered important for the achievement of common goals and supposedly led to benefits for individuals and communities.¹⁰ Fostering social capital has since been a significant component of development programming, and, in recent years, disaster recovery projects have also increasingly employed this notion of social capital as a strategy for building community resilience (Aldrich, 2012; 2015; Jovita et al., 2019; Nakagawa & Shaw, 2004).

The prominence of social capital in the current discourses of community resilience reveals, on one hand, the weight given to *social relations* as a determinant of capacities to reduce and mitigate risks, as well as to bounce back from disaster. On the other hand, it also compels us to ask, how are “communities” understood? And what kinds of social relations are deemed suitable in these constructions of resilience?

As demonstrated in Chapter 3, interventions to rebuild communities have the tendency to “render technical” (gendered) social relations that are otherwise complex, intangible, and amorphous (Bulley, 2013; Li, 2011). Social relations, through the lens of social capital, are thus instrumentalized, becoming “yet another “thing” or “resource” that unsuccessful individuals, families, communities, or neighborhoods lack” (Harriss, 2001, p. 97). Concretely in Tacloban,

this instrumentalization is shown in state attempts to manufacture responsible communities (Li, 2006; Rose, 1999; 2000; Rose & Lentzos, 2017) through disaster resettlement, prescribing specific forms of community associations (i.e., Homeowners Associations), collective life (for example, through *pintakasi* or compulsory community service), and livelihoods that can be pursued. Community is thus construed as a territory of government, with individuals viewed as “moral subjects” to be enhanced and whose affinities become tethered to a particular form of moral collectivity (Rose, 1996; 1999; Rose & Lentzos, 2017). Yet, despite the sustained efforts by the government to mold more resilient/responsible communities – through a bombardment of skills trainings, values formation, self-enhancement programs, livelihood assistance, and organizing – residents of resettlement villages in Tacloban North continued to struggle to recover from the impacts of Yolanda. Many study participants would tell me, as a form of counter-narrative, “*diri kami kampante. Waray pakabuhì didi ha Norte* [We are not *kampante*. We have no livelihood here in the north].”

As study participants spoke of *pakabuhì* in relation to disaster recovery, they often gauged the appropriateness and effectiveness of their livelihood strategies in affective terms: to feel *kampante*. The term is derived from the Spanish *campante* which means to be calm, at ease, comfortable, secure or confident.¹¹ Feeling *kampante* with their *pakabuhì* is qualified by study participants in a number of ways: to not always worry or be filled with anxiety, to be satisfied with living conditions, to have security of tenure, to be able to provide for the family adequately, and to ensure their children’s future (Chapter 4). To be able to feel *kampante* was also highly reliant on the presence and quality of place-based social relations which study participants have developed over time – family and kin, neighbors, and even the *suki*, or regular customers (for those engaged in trade), which had all constituted a social support system vital to *pakabuhì*.¹² As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, state-initiated resettlement resulted in the fragmentation of communities through the randomized assignation of housing units to beneficiaries. The outcome had been a sense of *social disarticulation* (see Cernea, 1997) expressed in statements like “I don’t know my neighbors,” “I feel lonely,” “I feel out of place,” or sometimes even conveyed non-verbally through tears and sighs.

Even though interventions in Tacloban usually invoked the value of *bayanihan*, or acts of mutual assistance, which have traditionally defined community relations in the Philippines (Bankoff, 2007; Su & Mangada, 2016), these were done so in a highly regulatory and closely monitored environment – often with costly penalties for non-participation. Rather than foster affective and caring bonds which are vital for creating supportive networks, the compulsory nature of mutual assistance instead became a burdensome imposition for some, especially women (Ganapati, 2012; Su & Tanyag, 2019), and at times generated tensions within the community. Nelia, for example, spoke about how she was sometimes seen as a *kontrabida* [female villain] for enforcing community service obligations of *pintakasi*: “they get mad when we impose penalties ... but I try to make them understand, it is not really about collecting fines, it’s about making sure they participate in our community!”

In communities under the Pope Francis Village project, *bayanihan* was also a central attribute of organizing communities for the housing initiative. While this was also not without its tensions and issues,¹³ with women still being mobilized in the majority of community affairs, the approach was less regulatory. Although residents were required to be active in community activities and meetings, residents were given the space to deliberate on, as well as contest and reshape, policies related to the housing project. In one of the casual conversations I had with community members in Costa Brava, one of them approached me and said in reference to the quality of their collective life after Yolanda:

You know what? The most important thing we got from this was not just a house. We were given a community. We used to be individualistic (*kanya-kanya*), but after we were organized, we became a community ... We were being driven out of this place after Yolanda but we remained. We cannot live in the North. There is no *pakabuhi* for us there. We rebuilt our houses on this land through *bayanihan*. We learned to work together.

The narrative of “we became a community” was a recurrent theme in a number of conversations I had with women (and men) in these neighborhoods. The photographs (Figures 5.7 and 5.8) of a community “meeting place” and a bell (*bagtingan*)¹⁴ often evoked these communitarian sentiments.



Figure 5.7 A community meeting place



Figure 5.8 A community bell, used to call community members to come together

Not only would they recount “official meetings” where they talk about community affairs which they considered important, but also the *tambayan* [hanging out], *inuman* [drinking sessions], spontaneous potlucks, birthday celebrations, and other informal social gatherings. The meeting place was essentially a multi-purpose social space that promoted interaction among

members of the community. While uncertainty and precarity were a constant feature of their everyday life (including continued threats of government eviction, economic marginalization, as well as threats of calamities),¹⁵ they were able to develop forms of solidarities which helped them, to a certain extent, feel *kampante* in confronting various challenges. Not all were as active in community associations as others, they had complaints about some policies at Pope Francis Village, and there were certainly interpersonal conflicts which I observed were happening in the community. Nonetheless, study participants regarded the kind of community life they had as valuable to their recovery.

A defining coping strategy that communities which remained at San Jose had was the establishment of a community-managed savings group called *bayanihan savings*, which was introduced by UPA.¹⁶ Study participants from these communities (Costa Brava and the adjacent community of Mahusay) unanimously referred to their savings scheme as an important aspect of their survival and recovery after Yolanda (Figure 5.9). Unlike microfinance, the savings groups operate independently: the members manage their finances, can avail of low-interest loans, as well as an emergency fund (called the “social fund”) for medical emergencies, illnesses, and childbirth, among others. These groups also generate “association funds” to be spent for the needs of the association, like repairs of the meeting place and common facilities. A savings group follows its own financial cycle and, once a year, members share equity (referred to as



Figure 5.9 A weekly community savings group meeting

“share-out”) proportionate to each one’s contributions. When I did my fieldwork in late November 2018, the mood was festive and filled with anticipation as the share-out was only weeks away in December. “Someone is going to buy a new sound system for *videoke* (video karaoke) soon!” one participant joked. “It’s going to be like a *fiesta*!” another commented.

According to Julie, as affirmed by other study participants, the savings group is a central aspect of their community life:

It is something we always look forward to because we know we can get something during share-out. The social fund is very important to us. We can access it in times of need. I availed of social fund when I gave birth to my second child.

Another participant said, “We trust that the community savings will be able to help us when we need it, we know how much is collected because the money is counted publicly, and we know who the officers are.”

Interestingly, community-based savings schemes have been attempted in government resettlement villages. However, such interventions rarely figured in the narratives of study participants in both Ridge View and Cawayanville. Indeed, like Sally’s story in the earlier part of this chapter, 5–6 moneylenders played a relatively more prominent role in the local economy in the resettlement villages in Tacloban North. This is not to say that solidaristic formations do not exist in Tacloban North (see Nelia’s story in Chapter 4, for example). However, it is important to take into consideration the kinds of environments and relationships that communities are enmeshed in which enable them (or not) to thrive with their *pakabuhi*. Highly regulatory environments, such as we see in government resettlement villages, for example, tend to produce highly guarded relationships and sets of obligations which could run contrary to visions of building the trust and solidarity intrinsic to the practice of *bayanihan*.

While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a detailed analysis of the quality of social relations in the communities involved in this study, I have endeavored to illustrate how the ability to recover rests not only on one’s skillful navigation of everyday circumstances or *diskarte*, but also on the presence of supportive networks and care relationships which allow people to *feel* that they are recovering (*kampante*) (Barrios, 2017; Shava et al., 2009). In many cases, constructions of resilience de-contextualize communities which are too narrowly defined and understood according to geographical boundaries and the idea of a shared fate (see Norris et al., 2008, p. 128). Thus, interventions tend to elide political, ethical, and affective relations in favor of technical, standardized, and cost-efficient projects that are detached from people’s lived worlds (Barrios, 2014; 2016; Boano, 2009). Using the lens of *pakabuhi*, I have attempted to show in this section how recovery, community, sense of self, and indeed resilience, are relationally produced in people’s everyday, affective, and socio-ecological practices (Richardson-Ngwenya & Nightingale, 2018).

The risk of neoliberal co-optation of resilience, as many critics have raised, is fueled when the state's technocentric mode of governance remains unchallenged. One main manifestation of this mode is the tendency of institutions to diagnose risk and vulnerabilities in narrowly technical terms. As Devanathan Parthasarathy (2018, p. 429) notes, such technocentric approaches favor "easy solutions which are 'visible' and which showcase the efficiency of disaster governance by mitigating risk in areas where the rich, elites and capital congregate to the relative neglect of the dispossessed, the marginalized, the poor and the disempowered." In the case of Tacloban, this translated directly into a single hazard avoidance discourse – relocating residents away from danger zones – which ignored the complex relational infrastructure sustaining life in those communities. This managerial framing, which prioritizes technocratic speed and capital, cannot recognize lived resilience. Elsewhere, I called this phenomenon the institutionalization of care-lessness (see Albuero-Cañete, 2024).

It is precisely at this juncture that we recognize the need for a different ethic of disaster governance. In the final section of this chapter, I focus on the notion of care – which has figured significantly in the ways that women regarded their relationships to nature and the environment and members of their respective communities – as a critical dimension of lived resilience. Ethics of care moves beyond a moral imperative to become a political practice that facilitates accountability and state responsibility. By shifting the focus from the technocentric management of risk to the relational and collective sustenance of life, the ethics of care reframes the notion of vulnerability. This compels the state, humanitarian organizations, and other disaster management institutions to support the essential interdependencies that lived resilience reveals, thereby demanding a more just and equitable recovery.

Living Care-Fully: Feminist Ethics of Care in Resilience Practice

How might care help us rethink resilience and re-imagine recovery? In this era where we face unprecedented socio-environmental crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic which brought the world to a standstill at the time I began writing this book, the imperative to find better ways of sustaining life for people and the planet has never been more urgent. The question of how to transform our practices in order to allow inhabitants of this planet to "survive well together" (Gibson-Graham et al., 2013) places care at the center of our endeavors to confront crises and adversity. If lived resilience takes part in the project of sustaining life, then at the very heart of resilience must be an ethics of care.

Within feminist scholarship, care entails attentiveness and "appropriate reciprocity" geared toward meeting the needs of human and non-human others (Bauhardt & Harcourt, 2018; Held, 2006; Tronto, 1993). While care may be understood and applied in diverse ways, I start from the oft-cited definition advanced by Joan Tronto and Berenice Fisher (1990, p. 40) in "Toward a feminist theory of caring," which presents care as:

a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, our selves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web.

From this definition, care is understood both as an embodied/affective disposition and a practice (Tronto, 2017) that has, at its core, the purpose of advancing the wellbeing of those being cared for and those we care about. To view life from the perspective of care is to acknowledge that our existence relies on relationships of interdependence, which Tronto and Fisher refer to as a *complex life-sustaining web*. This requires a recognition that vulnerability and dependence are inherent to the human condition, thus making care absolutely vital to individual and collective survival and flourishing (Hanrahan, 2015; Lawson, 2009), which happen to be key concerns in resilience thinking. Yet care rarely, if at all, figures in conceptualizations of disaster resilience. My goal in this section is to position feminist ethics of care as an ontological and moral basis for developing an understanding of resilience as lived.

Centering care in resilience ethics and practice can be an uncomfortable proposition. While the idea of mutual support and assistance has been embraced in disaster recovery and resilience-building frameworks (seen, for example, in appropriations of *bayanihan*), to adopt care as an ethic necessarily warrants an acceptance of vulnerability. Care reminds us that at some points in our existence we will be in a position of dependency and that at other moments, others might be dependent on us (Hanrahan, 2015; Lawson, 2007; Robinson, 2008). The inevitability of vulnerability can be difficult to comprehend when viewed through the techno-managerial framings of disaster risk. Vulnerability within these rationalities is considered an undesirable attribute that must be controlled, managed, if not eradicated (say, through resettlement and associated values formation/self-enhancement programs). However, feminist ethics of care recognizes that people become vulnerable and require care not because of their individual attributes or failures to live up to standards of resilience but because of “their positioning and relationships to others within political, economic, and social structures” (Jakimow et al., 2019, p. 279). Centering feminist ethics of care therefore requires *acts of imagination* (Bauhardt & Harcourt 2018) to rethink the politics and values that shape institutional processes, governing relations, and everyday life in relation to risk and vulnerability.

Women’s accounts of disaster recovery place care centrally in their practices to rebuild their lives after Yolanda. Practicing *diskarte* is largely driven by the need to provide care for themselves and their family members. They speak of their relations to nature in terms of the ability to mutually care for each other – with nature’s wrath perceived as a result of people’s lack of care for the environment. The ability to feel *kampante* in the context of disaster recovery was also highly dependent on extant and emerging care relationships among members of the community. The notion of *pakabuhì* emphasized the significance of interdependencies for endeavors to sustain life. The emphasis of

interdependence and care in women's narratives thus poses a challenge to the notion that individuals are wholly autonomous and self-sufficient – the very logic that underwrites neoliberal epistemologies and ethics.

While I have highlighted feminist formulations of care and their potentials for positive transformations in women's lives and the worlds they inhabit, care is also appropriated and used in other ways that may run counter to feminist ethics (see also Browne et al., 2021; Ticktin, 2011). In this book, I have underscored for example the ways in which care has figured in shaping governing relations: the deployment of care and benevolence as an affective-discursive mode of governing (Chapter 2), and the gendered ascription and *containment* of responsibilities to care as women's work (Chapter 3). In these instances, care is employed as a means to demonstrate and preserve the power of the privileged, especially through delegating the undervalued work of care to women (Tronto, 1993). These forms of care, according to Held (2006), must always be critically interrogated as indeed, care can be provided in ways that are “domineering, oppressive, insensitive, and ineffective” and that this is not “good care” (Held 2010, p. 121). Caring well requires that we address the dangers of paternalism and parochialism that undermine the intent of providing care. “Good care,” according to Tronto (2010), must always take into account three central foci: (1) the purpose of care (why do we care?), (2) the recognition of power within relationships of care, and (3) the need for pluralistic and particular tailoring of care according to specific circumstances and need. A feminist ethics of care, I argue, provides guidance on how people, communities, and institutions can care well – especially in times of adversity such as a disaster. Crucially, by demanding accountability and context-specific tailoring of programs (the tenets of “good care”), this feminist ethics elevates care from a moral ideal to a political mandate for institutional responsibility. Among others, it compels the state to actively invest in and sustain the collective relational infrastructure that constitutes lived resilience. In addition, we also need to draw attention to how relationships of care extend beyond human relationships to encompass our connectedness and entanglements with nature, the environment, and material objects (Barad, 2007; Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017).

Conclusion

During my last visit to Tacloban in 2019, I conducted community exhibits using the photographs and stories that were generated through the *PhotoKwento* process. This was not simply a way of presenting research findings but rather it was an invitation for community members to take part in interpreting the narratives generated by the photos. I was particularly affected by a statement of one woman who attended the event. While we were wrapping up the exhibit, she stood up and said emotionally:

These stories really show our conditions at the resettlement site, how we are working hard to recover and how we are also suffering. I really wish

others could see this. I wish those in power could see this. We seem to have just been forgotten. No one really hears what we have to say, about what we really want. Maybe if others see this and understand our circumstances, things could change.

Her words drove home an important point: *our experiences, our knowledges, our dreams provide an alternative perspective of how recovery should be*. Seeing the post-disaster context through women's eyes illuminated various aspects of recovery that may be ubiquitous but are largely taken for granted in dominant frameworks and approaches of resilience-building.

I approached the notion of resilience from the perspective of the vulnerable. Departing from prevailing technical definitions of vulnerability as the conditions or attributes that increase the susceptibility to the impacts of hazards (UNDRR 2020), I view vulnerability as produced in and through processes of differentiations that characterize particular contexts (Bankoff & Hilhorst, 2004; Resurrección, 2013). My deployment of the term, as discussed in Chapter 1, reflects a political stance regarding how vulnerability is produced. Therefore, to view disaster recovery and resilience through *epistemologies of the vulnerable* is linked to a political project of advancing the voices of the marginalized in shaping understandings and responses to disasters – as a potential force for imagining and working toward (other) possible futures.

By re-centering lived experiences of the vulnerable in understanding resilience, I aimed to present a view of resilience that goes beyond false dichotomies between resilience and vulnerability. Instead, I strived to advance a notion of resilience as an iterative endeavor, a process that takes into consideration contingency and states of becoming as a fundamental attribute of everyday life. Engaging with critical debates on the ways in which resilience facilitates neoliberal responsibilization – with the vulnerable bearing the burden of finding means for their own survival, and taking the blame when they are not able to – I argued for a reworking rather than the abandonment of the concept of resilience. Rather than discarding the aspirational character of resilience, I sought instead to broaden its ontological orientation, highlighting routinized improvisation, relationality, and ethics of care as key dimensions for imagining ways to live in a precarious world.

Lived resilience does not advance a universalizing ethics – I have no checklists to determine whether an individual, a community, or a system is resilient or not, because that is not the point. Lived resilience is attuned to uncertainties. It concedes that the strategies to achieve meaningful recovery is not always straightforward or clear, and often requires negotiation and improvisation. It embraces interdependency between human and non-human life and recognizes that recovery is not an individual responsibility to bear but dependent on mutual care. It centers feminist ethics of care as essential to the project of being able “to live as well as possible.” It requires institutions to be responsive to the importance of care relations – and support, rather than disrupt these in disaster interventions. What I offer with the concept then is an opportunity to open

possibilities for ways of *being, differently* (Rocheleau, 2015). It compels us to re-imagine aspirations for the future, after catastrophe and beyond current crises, that highlight not the aversion to living so-called “dangerous lives” with its embedded value judgments against the “deficient others” of society; rather, lived resilience emphasizes the embodiment of ethics that allows people, the environment, and the planet to lead more *care-full* lives in the face of uncertain futures.

Notes

- 1 In her influential work, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*, Anna Tsing (2005) presents the notion of friction as a metaphor for the diverse, competing, and conflicting interactions that make up the contemporary world. In place of universalisms and totalizing explanations about the nature and outcome of global processes, friction invites us to instead imagine the makeshift connections and uncertain collaborations that might exist across knowledges and practices and take place within “zones of awkward engagement.”
- 2 At the time of fieldwork, there was no direct water connection in most housing units in the government resettlement sites. Residents relied on three main sources of water: weekly deliveries from the government, water pumps/wells installed in various locations at the resettlement sites, and water sold through small-scale independent enterprises. For currency conversion of the amount presented, exchange rate US\$1 = Php 48.2 is used.
- 3 In the Philippines, moneylenders commonly referred to as “5–6” serve as last-resource informal financiers for micro-businesses (and for other everyday needs). These moneylenders (also called “Bombay,” as many 5–6 lenders are perceived to be Indian nationals) derive their 5–6 name from the manner in which they collect interest: for every Php 5 lent, the borrower pays back Php 6, with an interest of Php 1 (Kondo, 2003).
- 4 Apprehending errant beneficiaries was a central topic in a Local Inter-Agency Council (LIAC) meeting I once attended. The LIAC is the policy-making body in Tacloban that oversees its disaster reconstruction and recovery programs. It is represented by heads of various agencies and offices such as the National Housing Agency, the City Housing and Community Development Office, the City Social Welfare and Development Office, the Department of Education, and the City Planning and Development Office, among others.
- 5 Revitalization of the local economy constituted the second biggest projected costs in the Tacloban Recovery and Rehabilitation Plan. Over Php 13 billion (~ US\$265 million) was earmarked for assistance to affected businesses and regeneration of local livelihoods (TACDEV, 2014).
- 6 Alternatively, the terms *panginabuhian* (Bisaya) and *hanapbuhay* (Tagalog) were also used in interviews. They share the same core idea with *pakabuhì*: (*kina*)*buhì* or *buhay* both mean “life.”
- 7 One study participant told me how she would go to the sea near where she used to live whenever she had problems. She would then shout her frustrations and anxieties to the open sea. She told me, “The sea is my friend.”
- 8 These types of disaster narratives are not unique to Tacloban. Nature’s retribution for human neglect and abuse is a common theme that emerges in contexts of disaster in the Philippines. For example, the tragic flash floods in Ormoc City in 1991 and Mindoro Oriental in 1993, both of which claimed thousands of lives, were seen as a form of Nature’s chastisement for human greed. The flash floods were associated with commercial and illegal logging in the forested areas in these two locations (Bankoff, 2004).

- 9 The Philippines is considered the only Christian-majority country in Asia. According to the 2015 Population Census, around 80 percent of the population is Catholic, a result of over 300 years of Spanish colonial rule. Those practicing Islam comprise 6 percent of the population and less than 3 percent belong to *Iglesia ni Cristo* (Church of Christ) and Evangelical denominations.
- 10 Although Putnam's definition has been popularly taken up in development, the notion of social capital is frequently attributed to Pierre Bourdieu who defines it as

the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships in mutual acquaintance and recognition ... which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital.

(1986, p. 248; see also Bourdieu 1977)

In Bourdieu's conceptualization, the self-interested economic person is found at the heart of community social relations. Within this logic, individuals experience collective life in different ways, and may in some instances benefit *at the expense of others*. Thus, while both Putnam's and Bourdieu's formulations of social capital emphasize the co-constitutiveness of social and economic life, Putnam's notion of social capital highlights collective life as harmonious, while Bourdieu underscores how social capital is marked by conflict and contradiction (Rankin, 2002).

- 11 To feel confident is also expressed as *kumpyansa* in Filipino, from the Spanish word *confianza*.
- 12 When we speak of social relations and the communities formed out of these relations, however, it is important to acknowledge how such are always imbued with power. They are dynamic and place-based, but also porous rather than bounded (Escobar, 2001; Massey, 1994). Lastly, communities are also not unchanging in terms of capacity or membership, but rather, are "in a constant state of emergence and transformation over time" (Barrios, 2014, p. 331; see also Mitchell, 2002; Pickering, 2008). Hence, when I discuss the social relations that study participants are part of, I do so with the recognition that these relations are not *place-bound*, static, or benign.
- 13 For example, some community members, especially single mothers or those caring for the sick and for family members with disability, had difficulty complying with all the requirements due to care work at home. They were often left behind in terms of the hours of non-renumerated work they needed to render at the housing site (minimum of 700 hours). I also witnessed conflicts and tensions between neighbors related to the expected performance of community duties. Moreover, study participants spoke about rivalries or frictions between different communities which were beneficiaries of Pope Francis Village.
- 14 The bell was used to gather community members together whether for meetings, important announcements, or for emergencies.
- 15 Many community members still expressed fear of "another Yolanda" but they also said that from their experiences of the disaster, they are better prepared and have put in place evacuation plans. Another source of anxiety is the looming issue of whether or not the government would allow them to stay longer in the danger zone. Delays in construction at Pope Francis Village due to funding concerns, added to people's apprehensions about their future, especially as demolitions in neighboring coastal communities were ongoing.
- 16 *Bayanihan savings* is adapted from World Vision's approach to community-based financial sustainability, which established Community-Managed Savings and Credit Associations (COMSCA) in beneficiary communities. *Bayanihan savings* is usually comprised of 20–25 members who elect "savings officers" among themselves (a chairperson, a bookkeeper, a box keeper, two money counters, and three key holders). Each member is provided a "passbook" which is kept by the record keeper. The savings group drafts its own policies and members meet every Sunday.

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Figure C 'Hope springs eternal'. Flowers blooming on rocky ground

Conclusion

Hope in Virulent Times

Disaster Is a Portal

In an article published in the *Financial Times*, “The Pandemic is a Portal”, Arundhati Roy (2020) emphasizes how the COVID-19 pandemic offered an opportunity to rethink our practices and build a radically different world. Bringing to light the different forms of crises – economic, political, social, and moral – that have marked these “virulent” times, Roy described the pandemic as a gateway to another reality:

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

Amidst the despair and anxiety that characterize the present, Roy’s words provide hope that another future is possible – once we begin to imagine and work toward it.

Every disaster that occurs is always an opening for change – a portal to something potentially new. In many ways, the idea of disaster as a window of opportunity to rebuild for the “better” has long been appropriated by states, international organizations, and local development actors in carrying out recovery programs (Cretney, 2017; Fan, 2013; Grundy-Warr & Rigg, 2016). In various post-disaster settings, however, stepping through the portal has often meant the (continued) advancement of modernist, neoliberal, and capitalist rationalities and ethics couched in the discourse of building resilience. These conventional approaches to recovery and reconstruction have tended to produce adverse impacts on affected communities (Button & Schuller, 2016; Gaillard & Cadag, 2009; Gunewardena, 2008; Hunsberger et al., 2017; Klein, 2007). Where critical disaster studies have focused on and compellingly shown the tendencies of these hegemonic logics to define the terms of disaster recovery and “disastrously” shape the experiences of people accordingly (Schuller, 2008), this book attended to understanding how these logics operated and are negotiated in everyday life, in order to explore possibilities that would allow us to move beyond, or in spite of, them.

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The story of Tacloban's reconstruction might seem no different from other reconstruction stories we may have heard before. In such stories, disaster survivors who oftentimes come from the most marginalized groups of society are subjected to further marginalization, impoverishment, violence, and dispossession (Ambrose & Majeed, 2018; for examples in the Yolanda context; see Fitzpatrick & Compton, 2017; Portiera, 2015; Uson, 2017; Yee, 2018). Yet, while the dominant ideologies and practices that have shaped the reconstruction of Tacloban may seem pervasive and disenchanting for those of us who seek – and who have perhaps grown impatient for – transformative change, it is important to remember that the future such practices endeavor to achieve is but *one* possibility that exists on the other side of the portal. To detect other potentialities apart from the ones that are most visible and audible, we need to learn how to turn down the “louder worlds” that constantly claim our attention and inform the ways we understand what is possible (Cameron & Hicks, 2014; Law, 2010, p. 116; also Law & Urry, 2004).

Sharing the hope conveyed in Roy's piece above, this concluding chapter reflects on the value of women's everyday, embodied, and emotional experiences for reorienting the ways that we view and enact “resilient” disaster recovery. Using the lens of *lived resilience*, this book has attempted to analyze disaster recovery and reconstruction in a way that enables us to understand and challenge the hegemonies of thought and practice that shape life in post-Yolanda Tacloban (and beyond). I have argued how applying a feminist perspective is particularly fruitful in interrogating the institutional processes that direct disaster recovery. More importantly, adopting a feminist approach allows us to “feel what lurks in the interstices” of dominant practices (Stengers, 2002, p. 245) and to explore possibilities and actualities that are revealed from the rhythms and flows of the everyday (Kothari & Arnall, 2019).

What this book has offered is a perspective on and approach to examining and re-imagining disaster recovery and resilience. Women's perspectives and experiences, while partial, provide an insightful account of recovery processes and highlight issues which often remain hidden in gender-blind approaches to studying recovery. How then have women's experiences and perspectives helped us rethink resilience and disaster recovery? In the following sections, I review the lines of enquiry that have guided my work and highlight my key theoretical contributions. I provide concluding thoughts on the study's implications for practice and research.

Resilience Through Women's Eyes

In the last couple of decades, the concept of resilience has saturated not only disaster studies and practice, but also the fields of urban planning, natural resource management, architecture, engineering, climate sciences, and development, among others. In the context of disaster recovery and reconstruction specifically, resilience has become the holy grail of efforts to build the adaptive capacities of individuals and systems in the face of future risk and uncertainty

(Nightingale, 2015). In conversation with critical perspectives that have challenged the (neoliberal) politics and ethics upon which current resilience practices have been rooted, this book has been concerned with how resilience can be re-imagined and reclaimed as a potentially transformative process. With Tacloban as a case study, I asked, *what possibilities for re-imagining resilience might women's experiences of recovery reveal?*

Approaching this question necessitated a reflection on what it entailed to engage with the concept and practice of resilience as it played out in the local context. Exploring possibilities for alternatives first required gaining an understanding of how resilience approaches were operationalized. This meant prying open resilience thinking and practices using the tools of analysis available to us and, applying a feminist curiosity, looking and feeling around for potentialities which might not be readily visible or tangible.

In this regard, I have made three key theoretical moves in pursuit of my research question. The first move began with methodology – of claiming a feminist orientation and positioning women's experiences as a theoretical and analytical resource for understanding disaster recovery. With the marginalization of knowledges embedded in the everyday embodiments of crises of those labeled as “vulnerable,” I advanced the need to rethink recovery and resilience through the *epistemologies of the vulnerable* – beginning with women's standpoint. The second move involved interrogating the institutional processes of rebuilding from the perspective of the everyday and revealing the gendered, affective, and ethical terrains upon which recovery takes place. The third move demonstrated how women's routinized improvisations, struggles for livelihood, and extant and emerging care relations – suffused with their aspirations and hopes for the future – provide us with the conceptual tools to rethink resilience as “lived” and, as such, entangled in processes of becoming. In this final move, I underscore the necessity of a feminist ethics of care as a moral basis for forging futures after disaster. Each is reviewed in turn below.

Through the Lens of the Vulnerable: Research as World-Making

Social research may seek to describe, explain, or interpret the world; but more than this, research also helps shape and *enact* worlds (Law & Urry, 2004). The ways in which we use theoretical frameworks, construct and interpret data, and present our findings all contribute to making some aspects of our world “more real” than others (Cameron & Hicks, 2014; Gibson-Graham et al., 2016). In this sense, research is very much a political, generative, and performative practice – and therefore plays a role in (re)making our world according to the ethical and political commitments that researchers align with. Taking on this research thus meant confronting the questions: *What kind of world do we want to help bring into being? Whose views inform these aspirations for world-making? How do we incorporate these visions and commitments into the research process?*

The development of *PhotoKwento* as a primary research method is a product of these reflections (Figure 6.1). Embodying a feminist orientation, *PhotoKwento* was designed not only as a means to construct data but as a way of advancing the political and ethical standpoints of feminist research: of unpacking the ways in which power operates in order to help change them. This includes addressing power relations embedded in research encounters.

Co-constructing knowledge with women and striving to foster engaged and ethical research relationships using participant-generated photographs carried with it a political project of reclaiming vulnerability. I have argued that knowledges of those cast as vulnerable are often devalued in favor of technical, expert, and western (androcentric) knowledges that continue to dominate disaster studies and practice (Alburo-Cañete, 2021; Gaillard, 2019). Women, in many disaster-related studies and interventions, often perfunctorily fall into this category of the “vulnerable” (Seager, 2014). As elaborated in Chapter 1, I regard vulnerability not as a position of passivity, helplessness, or deficiency – a view which has legitimated the countless techno-managerial interventions enacted by resilience programs – but as a site of potentiality for becoming-otherwise (Butler, 2016; hooks, 2004; Nelson, 2014). Those who occupy positions of vulnerability and who are largely excluded from the production of knowledge often offer the most insightful views regarding the processes and impacts of recovery initiatives, as well as bearing the impetus for exploring alternatives. Thus, starting with women’s standpoint, *PhotoKwento* has been committed to privileging what I have called epistemologies of the vulnerable as



Figure 6.1 Study participant taking pictures for *PhotoKwento*

an alternative lens to studying experiences of and responses to disasters and as a way to re-imagine other possible futures.

Toward this end, *PhotoKwento* re-centered the everyday, embodied, and emotional dimensions of women's daily life. This approach allowed both myself and research participants to (re)discover facets of ordinary experiences that are significant for understanding recovery but often escape the gaze of conventional disaster research: the centrality of women's care-based practices and their embodied labors of recovery, the aspirations and hopes etched onto a house provided after a disaster, the intimate ways in which state recovery programs are encountered, and the emotions attached to and generated by place, among others.

The study's methodology offers a significant contribution to the field of disaster studies by making visible – figuratively and literally – the everyday experiences of ordinary women; and, with those experiences, allow for the examination of institutional processes that shape reconstruction. While I have focused on women's experiences for my study, epistemologies of the vulnerable advanced by *PhotoKwento* can more broadly encompass viewpoints of other groups considered vulnerable along various and intersectional axes of identities – ethnicity, race, sexuality, class, age, and so on – and can be harnessed/mobilized to re-define the terms of rebuilding for the better in different disaster settings. My methodological approach, therefore, can be a useful tool for those who work with vulnerable groups.

Deconstructing Tacloban's Reconstruction

Critical scholars have often underscored what resilience programs *do*. In much of the critical literature, resilience is incarnated as an array of biopolitical interventions, in a Foucauldian sense, in order to produce subjects who can be responsible for their own survival in the face of risk. Responsibilization, or the ways in which neoliberal systems devolve responsibilities for coping with risks from the state to individuals, households, and communities, has become a recurrent theme in such critiques. This book has contributed to and enriched these perspectives by providing ethnographic detail not just on *what* resilience programs do, but also on *how* such programs operate locally. I have advanced an understanding of recovery and reconstruction as a site where discursive practices and affective work are constantly performed not simply to rebuild from destruction, but to produce new life-worlds that alter how people relate to themselves, others, and their environment.

By examining resilience and its iteration in disaster reconstruction Build Back Better from the standpoint of women, I revealed how rebuilding from Yolanda has been implicated in a citizenship project that aimed to produce responsible/resilient communities. This citizenship project was primarily directed toward vulnerable urban poor informal settlers who had been displaced by Yolanda. Disaster reconstruction, as it has played out in Tacloban, not only involved physical and spatial transformations in the city's post-disaster landscape. It also included an imperative for social and moral transformation: to create

“responsible” citizens who can demonstrate that they have earned the right to live in the resilient city.

I identified two novel modes of governing vulnerable communities that operated in Tacloban: *benevolent discipline* and *governing through women*. Operating at different but overlapping scales, both mechanisms of power attempt to institute ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving around changes introduced to socio-spatial environments and community life in the processes of disaster resettlement. I have drawn attention to how discourse, affect, and ethics have been mobilized in reshaping life in resettlement communities.

Chapter 2 presented *benevolent discipline* as a distinctive mode of authority and governing that is animated by the state's performances of “benevolence” and “care.” Through such performances, the state attempts to regulate the conduct of its constituents toward modernist aspirations for recovery. The workings of the “benevolent state” became apparent in the discourse of safety that has framed reconstruction and resettlement initiatives as well as in the forms of *affective technologies of recovery* employed to discipline affective life. Disciplining affective life involved: (1) the inculcation of risk-averse dispositions by reinforcing negative emotive responses toward the dangerous; and (2) the cultivation and repatterning of desires for a valued kind of life.

The concept of *benevolent discipline* extends understandings of the workings of biopolitics and governmentality, which have been major themes in much critical scholarship on disaster. It shows how post-disaster governance involves the management not only of movement, activities, and spatial arrangements of the body politic, but also the “management of the heart” (Rudnycky, 2011), that is, the cultivation of affective responses to visions and initiatives for recovery (Barrios, 2017). Moreover, *benevolent discipline* offers a reconceptualization of conventional understandings of the state. While the state in its multiple manifestations may indeed “govern from a distance” as it undertakes bureaucratically-driven practices (Lawrence & Wiebe, 2018; Rose, 1999; 2000), it is also intimately engaged and itself exudes affective qualities.

While Chapter 2 outlined the state's affective-discursive practices that sought to transform the social and moral landscape of Tacloban toward becoming modern/resilient, Chapter 3 tackled the question: *who bears the burden of transformation?* Pervasive discourses in disaster recovery and reconstruction often romanticize community participation, social capital, and mutual aid (*bayanihan*) as a means to build resilient, responsible, and self-governing communities. What is often left unsaid is the extent to which these communitarian solutions rely on harnessing norms of female altruism and impose upon women the responsibility to build the resilience of their families and communities.

I demonstrated how *governing through women*, a concept I coined to refer to the set of governmental practices that instrumentalize women's care-based practices and participation, is a defining feature of community recovery interventions in Tacloban. Bringing into conversation the fields of critical disaster studies and gender and development, I applied the notion of feminization of responsibility and/or obligation (Chant, 2014) to disaster recovery and

developed a novel analysis of how governing everyday life after disaster is moored to women's socially ascribed roles and obligations to care.

Drawing from women's narratives, I illuminated how Tacloban's (feminized) citizenship project involved three processes of subjectification: (1) discarding the old self; (2) enhancing the new self; and (3) activation of collective allegiances for reshaping community life. These processes were facilitated by values formation and "self-enhancement" programs, and organizing of Homeowners Associations in resettlement villages, among others. These state interventions worked on generating affective attachments toward the ideal of a responsible, desirable, and ethical citizen, as well as circulating contempt and disgust for the threatening anti-citizen exemplified by the image of the unruly "squatter." Through processes of subjectification, the state attempted to forge and discipline subjects who were not only amenable to new norms and values but who, most importantly, would also become a means for circulating such norms and values in their home and community.

My exposition of how reconstruction in Tacloban has enacted *governing through women* contributes to rethinking women's participation in disaster management and recovery. While such has been generally heralded as a form of empowerment – and in certain respects they can be – the instrumentalization of their participation and care-based practices in the service of state aspirations for recovery comes at a cost. To rephrase a popular adage, *with great responsibilities come great liabilities*. As resilience is built on the backs of women, participation has often resulted in the depletion of women's time and energy as well as in emotional exhaustion. In this context, what might be considered as "empowerment" could actually be an indication of women's further marginalization, if not their exploitation (Kabeer, 1999).

In sum, Chapters 2 and 3 dwelled on the discursive, affective, and ethical dimensions of state-sanctioned recovery initiatives and showed how these coalesced to produce the responsible/resilient urban subject. In both chapters, we find how "care" is appropriated and instrumentalized. On one hand, the state adopts a posturing of care to help legitimize its reconstruction programs, that are to a great extent informed by global frameworks around risk, vulnerability, and resilience. On the other, women's ascribed care responsibilities are harnessed to enact forms of community recovery envisioned by the state. The way that care is deployed and (mis)allocated in resilience practices serves to further entrench modernist, neoliberal, and masculinist governmental strategies through responsibilization, embodied in contextually specific ways. However, while resilience seems perfectly aligned with neoliberal logics and ethics, I have argued that resilience is in fact far more contingent and politically malleable than many critics would allow (Grove, 2018). In a similar way, people's responses to processes of subjectification, and enactments of agency are also contingent. And it is in this sense of contingency and indeterminacy, which is very much a characteristic of the everyday, that I situate the possibility for re-imagining resilience based on a feminist ethics of care.

Re-Imagining Resilient Disaster Recovery

What indeed might “lurk in the interstices” of seemingly totalizing logics and practices of (neoliberal) resilience? As modernist, neoliberal, and patriarchal hegemonies of resilience practices are often depicted as all-encompassing, potentialities for alternatives can seem elusive. Indeed, such potentialities often lie below the radar, reside in forms that are not easily recognizable, or may be dismissed as too small or fragmented to make a difference. Therefore, Part II of the book took on the task of looking and feeling around for openings for charting alternative pathways toward recovery (Stengers, 2002).

In pursuit of potentialities, Chapters 4 and 5 reconceptualize resilience and disaster recovery as entangled in processes of becoming. By centering women's everyday practices, embodied labors, and emotional relations in my analysis, I directed attention to how recovery is constantly a work of creation, self-formation, inventiveness, and hope amidst the misery of loss and displacement – making resilience an open project that is constantly in the making.

I began with an acknowledgment of how possibilities are created through acts of hope and imagination. Thus, in Chapter 4, I have argued how aspirations are a potent force for forging possible lives after disaster as a form of “navigational capacity” toward a hoped-for future (Appadurai, 2004). Examining aspirations provides us with an understanding of how the future is lived in the present. Therefore, hopes and aspirations, as forms of future orientations, suffuse enactments of the everyday. In particular, I investigated how women navigated disaster recovery in light of their hopes and dreams for the future. Focusing analysis on post-disaster housing, I have shown how women's aspirations for a house of one's own – mediated through encounters with *balay nga bato* [concrete houses] – have been entangled but not necessarily aligned with hegemonic visions of recovery. It was in the contingent results of such encounters that a “margin of manoeuvrability” revealed itself (Massumi, 2002).

Engaging with Appadurai's (2004) notion of *capacity to aspire*, I explored how entanglements of multiple aspirations for recovery revealed the political potential of hopes and dreams for enabling articulations and imaginations of non-conventional futures. This political potential emerged through moments of rupture (Head, 2010) – instances when fantasies of the good life promised by resettlement began to crumble. While ruptures have often not resulted in radical shifts from the prescribed course of recovery, they have revealed how women actively and constantly sought possibilities in pursuit of aspirations and re-constituted themselves in the process.

In some cases, however, ruptures have driven agentic impulses for pursuing alternative futures outside the logics of Build Back Better. In the account of the community of Costa Brava, I have shown how the residents – through their refusal of state-managed relocation – have re-negotiated the terms of engagement in disaster recovery and rekindled hope in new forms of care relations. Based on the emergence of these caring bonds, the community was able to re-imagine their relations to themselves, others, the state, and the environment. The broadening of

individual and collective horizons beyond the affordances offered by the state showed how building communities' capacity to aspire can open possibilities for transformative changes.

Given the open-endedness of disaster recovery and the aspirations that help shape it, Chapter 5 reflected on what it means to become resilient. It advanced the concept of *lived resilience* which focuses on the plurality of means for navigating, imagining, and adapting to the indeterminacies and contingencies of life in the face of precarity and the unknown. Hence, lived resilience is not an attribute that can be technically engineered, which has been a tendency of many resilience programs. Rather it comprises a *life project* that seeks to find ways, despite uncertainties, wherein we can survive well together in a world that we share with non-human others.

Drawing from the routines, rhythms, and flows of daily experiences of women as they navigate the intricacies of disaster recovery, I identified three mutually constitutive dimensions of lived resilience: (1) routinized improvisation; (2) relationality; and (3) a feminist ethics of care. Lived resilience resides in the ways in which women have creatively repurposed everyday life – exhibited through *diskarte* [skillful navigation of life circumstances]. Such creative repurposing, however, always takes place within socio-ecological relations and is intimately connected to pursuits of one's *pakabuhi* – which I employ to mean the wide array of practices which sustain life. These dimensions do not just describe survival; at times, they have constituted a form of everyday resistance. *Diskarte*, for instance, has manifested as the tactical defiance of the rules of formal markets, technocratic livelihood programs, and prohibitive occupancy regulations, while *pakabuhi* is the collective counter-conduct that resists the state's attempts to fragment and individualize communities through displacement and housing schemes. Lived resilience can be seen as an *epistemic act of resistance* that is founded on the epistemologies of the vulnerable. It rejects managerial governance and insists on the political recognition of vulnerability and care as the necessary ethical preconditions for recovery.

The ethnographic data, which has demonstrated how recovery, community, sense of self, and resilience are relationally produced in people's everyday, affective, and socio-ecological practices (Richardson-Ngwenya & Nightingale, 2018), has revealed that the ability to recover rests not only in one's skillful navigation of everyday circumstances, but also on the presence of supportive networks and care relationships. This observation underscores the importance of the third dimension of lived resilience: embodying a feminist ethics of care. A feminist ethics of care recognizes that interdependence and vulnerability are facts of life. Embodying this ethical orientation means advancing an understanding that disaster recovery is not an individual responsibility to bear – or a responsibility that should be borne only by a particular sector of society. Rather, recovery is dependent on mutual care, including care for the environment. A feminist ethics of care, therefore, poses a challenge to neoliberal ethics which is underwritten by the logic of rationality, autonomy, and self-sufficiency.

To summarize, viewing disaster recovery from the standpoint of women – which comprises epistemologies of the vulnerable – enables us to re-imagine

disaster recovery and resilience. Chapters 4 and 5 have underscored how disaster recovery is characterized not by the determinacies implied by technocentric and rationalistic approaches to building resilience, but by contingency and open-endedness, shaped and re-shaped by hopeful endeavors. Hopes and aspirations for a better (or perhaps *different*) post-disaster future permeate the everyday enactments and embodiments of recovery which translate into routinized improvisations and relational practices that sustain life. I have argued that adopting a feminist ethics of care in resilience thinking and practice is essential not only for rebuilding from destruction, but also, and more importantly, *regenerating* social and ecological systems that will allow us to “repair our ‘world’ so that we can live in it as well as possible” (Tronto & Fisher, 1990, p. 40). What I offer with the concept of lived resilience is a contribution to the search for alternatives – alternatives which we can imagine residing on the other side of the disaster portal.

Care as Regenerative Practice

I have written much of this book while the world continued to reel from the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, study participants’ stories of suffering, perseverance, and indeed, hope, have been instructive for thinking through and appreciating in a different light the struggles of living in uncertainty and vulnerability – struggles which most of us shared during this period, although not equally. Without foreseeing that a pandemic of this gravity would ever occur in this lifetime, or at least in the course of completing this project, I demonstrated how women’s narratives of recovery in Tacloban have driven home a point that the world has now begun to see, talk about, and consider more seriously: that we are all vulnerable, interconnected, and interdependent, and that these conditions have placed the importance, if not *necessity*, of care at the heart of our survival (see Branicki, 2020; Butler, 2020; Forester, 2020; Harcourt, 2020; UN WOMEN, 2020).

During these virulent times, the world is once again called to Build Back Better and become resilient (OECD, 2020; United Nations, 2020). And while the notions of well-being, inclusiveness, and equity have found their way into the mainstream discourses of pandemic recovery, key normative assumptions regarding how crisis is managed remain anchored on hegemonic frameworks and values that privilege “expert” knowledge, cost-efficiency, and techno-managerial/neoliberal modes of governing. Despite the voluminous body of work that has been produced about living with risk, becoming resilient, and promoting sustainable development, to echo Tronto (2013, p. ix), “*nothing will get better* until societies figure out how to put responsibilities for caring at the center of their democratic political agendas” (emphasis mine). It is precisely this pervasive managerial logic, which devalues relationality and context-specific worldviews, and justifies the withdrawal of state support for the poor, that provides the structural underpinnings for more overt forms of colonial and structural violence.

On a more urgent note, as this manuscript came to completion, the world bore witness to the horrific colonial brutality and genocide against the people of Gaza and Palestine (UN Human Rights Council, 2026). This ongoing political and moral catastrophe – a devastating, high-visibility expression of the same structural violence and institutional neglect that fuel countless less-reported crises worldwide – underscores what happens when *care-less* global institutions and power structures fail politically and ethically. In this context, the unwavering perseverance and collective survival of the Palestinian people exemplify lived resilience as a form of political and epistemic resistance. Their persistence compels us to acknowledge that the capacity to sustain life under conditions of such extreme precarity and violence must serve as a global mandate to redefine resilience, making the dismantling of colonial violence and structural inequality the first precondition for any meaningful recovery.

In these concluding thoughts, I draw on the findings of my research and advance care as a necessary ethical framework that will help re-orient the conventional wisdoms of “managing” disasters and crises. Taking off from the perspective of lived resilience, I recast resilient recovery as a process of *regeneration* – of “repairing and healing the tapestry of interrelations that make up the bodies, places and communities that we all are and inhabit” (Escobar, 2020). Framing care as a regenerative practice, I highlight some implications that my study has for practice and research.

The theoretical contribution of lived resilience has specific practical implications because it shifts the focus of disaster governance from managing technocratic outcomes to supporting care practices and collective processes. The concept demands a fundamental transformation in policy design, moving away from a responsibilizing, technocentric approach to one that invests in networks of care. This requires policy to recognize and validate routinized improvisation as a means through which people survive and thrive, designing livelihood and other recovery programs that are flexible and actively structured to mitigate the strain imposed by women’s unequal care burdens. Furthermore, the ethics of care must become the state’s (and other actors’) ethical grounding, compelling institutions to shift accountability from ensuring individual self-sufficiency to mandating systemic investment in relational networks, ensuring that recovery is viewed as a collective responsibility.

Addressing the Containment of Care as Women’s Responsibility

My research has clearly demonstrated how women’s ascribed roles and responsibilities for care have been harnessed in the service of rebuilding communities. This feminization of responsibility for community recovery is not unique to Tacloban. In many different settings, women have performed critical roles that contribute to family and community recovery. Such performances are often celebrated as participation, empowerment, and a testament to women’s resilience. But, as raised long ago by Cooke and Kothari (2001), participation

also bears the potential for tyranny, especially when the burden of transforming communities for the better rest squarely on the shoulders of women.

While the COVID-19 pandemic had led us to place a spotlight on and applaud those who have taken on the task of caring – whether in health facilities or at home – the reality remains that care work continues to be undercompensated (if at all), devalued, and performed disproportionately by women and other underprivileged groups (such as migrant workers, people of color, and the poor). Answering the question “who provides care?” therefore speaks volumes about the structures of privilege that prevail in a society.

Adopting a feminist ethics of care requires that we delink the work of care as women's responsibility. Care is not a “virtuous disposition” that women innately embody; but rather it is a value and a social practice that are pursued relationally in order to enhance the well-being of oneself and that of others (Branicki, 2020; Held, 2006; Noddings, 2001; Tronto, 1993). Care work only becomes “contained” as a woman's role because of the refusal of the privileged to take on the responsibility to care and to be responsive to the needs of others. Therefore, embodying a feminist ethics of care is a transformative moral framework that encompasses imperatives for equity and justice.

The implication of this insight for recovery programs is clear: Build Back Better requires a reflexive approach to how the responsibility of care for the family and the community can be better distributed. Community-based interventions must be able to foster the value and practice of mutual care while also addressing gendered inequalities and social norms that tend to place the burden of care on women (Alburo-Cañete, 2022; 2024). Social research has a role to play in advancing care as an ethical framework for recovery, not only through critique but also by making more real the practices of care that may exist, which have been made barely visible by hegemonic perspectives.

Institutionalizing an Ethics of Care

One of the greatest dangers of appropriating care in institutional practices is paternalism. Paternalism is manifested in the ways in which those who provide care – such as state institutions, aid organizations, and non-governmental organizations in the context of disaster response and recovery – assume that they know better than those who receive care. In my research, the state interprets its paternalistic relationship with disaster-affected urban poor communities as an expression of its benevolence. Here, the state privileges its own knowledge and that of “experts” over the knowledges of the urban poor. Recovery is, therefore, performed through and articulated from the perspective of the powerful, of those in authority, which often result in the creation of blanket measures which ignore the social conditions, relations, and inequalities that are specific to affected communities. As a consequence, suffering, if not violence in its multiple incarnations, is experienced by disaster survivors at the very point where care is supposedly enacted.

Ethics of care is anchored on values of empathy, attentiveness, and reciprocal responsibility (Lawson, 2007). To create “caring institutions,” as Tronto (2010) has argued, we need to be attentive to power, especially to the inequalities that exist within care relationships. Disaster contexts epitomize the power imbalances between those who provide assistance and those who require it – as the stakes are quite literally life and death. To embody care, institutions that are in the position to provide care, assistance and/or relief must be cognizant of the great power they hold over disaster survivors who depend on them, and exercise even greater responsibility and accountability in centering the well-being of affected communities in their interventions. This means attentiveness to the plurality and particularity of needs that exist in specific contexts by making sure that the perspectives, aspirations, and feelings of the vulnerable are taken seriously and centrally inform programs and interventions.

Research in this field can contribute to promoting ethics of care in institutional practices by investigating the ways that organizations and agencies can operationalize the values of care in the performance of their particular mandates. This can include exploring contexts where such practices exist and making them visible or developing/enhancing frameworks of governance and service delivery. Pursuing research that advance epistemologies of the vulnerable can be a starting point for exploring care-full possibilities.

Embedding Physical Reconstruction in Socio-Ecological Relationships

The built environment is a central element of disaster reconstruction. While infrastructure may simply be seen as objects in a utilitarian sense, my research showed how the built environment is embedded in socio-ecological relations and entangled in the creation of fantasies and desires as well as in processes of place-making. Yet, in Tacloban (as elsewhere), reconstruction initiatives, such as housing and disaster-mitigating infrastructure (e.g., tide embankment), often do not consider these entanglements as essential to disaster recovery.

Applying an ethics of care to infrastructure might seem incredulous. But if we view the built environment as constitutive of human and non-human habitats (Gibson-Graham et al., 2016), we begin to situate housing, flood management structures, roads, and so on in relation to a wider socio-ecological system. Thus, considerations about location of settlements, design, construction processes, building materials, environmental impact, and regulations about how infrastructure is used, accessed, or occupied are all ethical issues.

How can reconstruction of the built environment be re-oriented toward becoming caring and regenerative? How can post-disaster housing, in particular, foster caring relationships not just among people but also toward the environment? How can settlement projects take into account affective relations that people have with place and material objects, like a house? These are some lines of enquiry that could potentially enrich our understanding and improve our practices of disaster reconstruction.

Conclusion

I opened this concluding chapter with a reference to hope – of finding a more caring and just world on the other side of the portal. We are indeed at a time when we have been given a precious opportunity to assess what we value. While we are seeing the unravelling of our social systems, which continue to find their footing in the midst of the shock caused by a pandemic, the threats of climate change, and genocidal violence, we are also redrawing the ways that we understand care, social relationships, our interconnectedness, and our vulnerabilities. Many are beginning to ask whether “bouncing back” to normal is enough, or if there are other possibilities that can be explored.

Will Yolanda, the coronavirus pandemic, and other forms of social and ecological crises that beset our world today, give way to the creation of new communities of care, on connections based on solidarity and kindness? Will we finally see the regeneration of a world that places care rather than economic growth as a central ethic of existence? It is a great dream, for sure. But the truth is, there is much work to be done toward this end. The future, as we have come to talk about it here, will always be uncertain.

But we can act on hope. If there is anything I have learned from the women I have worked with in Tacloban, it is that hope is powerful. According to Sara Ahmed (2017, p. 2):

Hope is not at the expense of struggle but animates struggle; hope gives us a sense that there is a point to working things out, working things through. Hope does not only or always point toward the future, but carries us through when the terrain is difficult, when the path we follow makes it harder to proceed. *Hope is behind us when we have to work for something to be possible.*

(emphasis mine)

Thus, I close this book on a hopeful note – that we learn to find ways to live differently as we recover from the lasting impact of the pandemic and face the challenges of multiple crises, including climate change, with care and feminist solidarity at the heart of our actions.

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