



# Disasters, Ruins, and Crises: Masculinity and Ramifications of Storms in Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

This article explores climate disasters in the era of the Anthropocene from a gender specific crisis perspective; as conditions of unpredictable outcomes and ruination which are encroaching differentiated ramifications upon inhabitants in coastal Vietnam. The article contests the ways in which the notions of vulnerability and resilience tend to understand a disaster as an interrupting event, which could be overcome by those upon whom the damage has befallen so life can return to normal. A crisis perspective, the article argues, offers an alternative avenue to an analysis of disasters by focusing on the entanglements between a crisis of emergency and a spectrum of various crises antecedents fostered by gendered livelihoods, masculinized privileges, and violences. When various crises modalities, intensities, and temporalities intersect with one another, a crisis in context might morph into crisis as context; into a disordered order of slow harm which impedes the return to pre-disaster normalcy.

**KEYWORDS** Anthropocene; crisis; climate disaster; gender; masculinity; violence; Vietnam

The salty smell of the ocean embraces Long Lanh, a fishing community in central coastal Vietnam. As the shore is never far away storms are frequent and inhabitants are used to stay alert ready to protect their family, house, and boat when a storm comes in. After the fact, when the storm has dispersed, or propelled off to other sites, inhabitants are facing the ruptures and the ruins they ‘are “left with”’ (Stoler 2013: 9).<sup>1</sup>

Storms inflict ruination as ‘an *act* perpetrated, a *condition* to which one is subject, and a *cause* of loss’ (Stoler 2013: 11; italics in original). Crisis and ruination, as I highlight in this article, are neither static nor do they impact women, men, and various groups in identical ways. For some inhabitants, a disaster is a temporary crisis; a bracketing of daily life, which even might lead to renewal, for instance, when an old and storm damaged house is substituted with a new. For others, a catastrophe is a crisis

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which exacerbates already existing crises conditions due to matters such as poverty or violence; when a crisis of emergency interlocks with impeding socio-economic antecedents, the crisis might turn into a state of chronicity (Vigh 2008: 9). A condition marked by disordered order and the ways in which perpetual ruination conditions the infliction of slow harm upon lifeworlds, livelihoods, and environments.<sup>2</sup>

While anthropology has provided detailed accounts of how indigenous people live with and manage a catastrophic crisis, only little research has been conducted on the ways in which a climate crisis interconnects with configurations of masculinities and femininities in particular contexts and, in doing so, emboldens or contests hierarchies, privileges, and powers between women and men (Oliver-Smith 1996, 1999; Hoffman & Oliver-Smith 2002). A gender-blind perspective has predominated in disaster studies, hence ‘a stranger silence [...] exists on gender and climate change within the social sciences’ (MacGregor 2009: 136) and only recently have gender and masculinity been included into studies of climate disasters. With some exceptions (e.g. True 2013; Godfrey & Torres 2016), these studies tend to apply a macro level approach on disaster vulnerability, resilience, risk, and mitigation strategies (Enarson & Chakrabarti 2009; Fordham 2011; Bradshaw 2013; Ginige *et al.* 2014; Enarson & Pease 2016).

In this article, I consider climate disasters from a gender specific crisis perspective; as ‘conditions that make outcomes unpredictable’ (Habermas 1992 [1976]: 1) by encroaching differentiated ramifications upon women and men in Long Lanh, and beyond.<sup>3</sup> In doing so, I would contest the ways in which the notions of vulnerability and resilience tend to understand a disaster as an interrupting event which can be overcome by those upon whom the damage has befallen so life can return to how it used to be (Walby 2015; Wisner 2016). While the imperative for post-disaster recuperation is indisputable, reducing a climate catastrophe to a bracketing of normal life calls for vigilance (see Endres & Six-Hohenbalken 2014; MacGregor 2017).

A crisis perspective, I would suggest, offers an alternative avenue to an analysis of what has become known as the Anthropocene (Haraway *et al.* 2015). As an analytical prism, a crisis perspective helps us to unravel the entanglements between a disastrous climate crisis of emergency and a spectrum of existing crises antecedents fostered by gender specific livelihoods, hierarchies, and violences (Denton 2002; True 2013; Ginige *et al.* 2014). When various crises modalities, intensities, and temporalities intersect, a crisis in context might morph into crisis as context; into a crisis of chronicity which hinders the return to a pre-disaster normalcy (Vigh 2008: 9; see also Roitman 2014; Walby 2015). For my discussion, I am drawing on ethnographic data collected in patrilineally organized coastal Long Lanh. Here, fishing is associated with a certain kind of masculinity which not only informs daily life but even impacts how various kinds of crises unfold prior to, under, and in the aftermath of a storm.<sup>4</sup>

## The Anthropocene

The Asia-Pacific region is particularly prone to tropical storms and water related disasters (ESCAP 2015; UNDP Asia and the Pacific 2018). According to the Long Lanh People’s Committee and Climate Mitigation Group, climate change has resulted in

more frequent and violent storms in coastal Vietnam. These observations are in line with natural science research which indicates that human interventions in nature have pushed us into the geological Age of Man, also known as the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Steffen *et al.* 2007; Galaz 2014).<sup>5</sup> In the era of the Anthropocene, the pervasiveness and influence of human activities on Earth are assumed to force the planet into planetary *terra incognita*; into unknown land (Galaz 2014).<sup>6</sup> Findings show that the Earth is becoming warmer and less biologically diverse with less forests and weather which is both wetter and stormier (Steffen *et al.* 2007: 614; UNDP Asia and the Pacific 2018).<sup>7</sup>

While the Anthropocene appears to be an overall encompassing global reality (Haraway *et al.* 2015), it is also uneven (Wisner *et al.* 2003). Some places are more disposed to ecological ruination than others, and some people's lifeworlds and livelihoods are more precarious to the perils of climate alternations than others (Oliver-Smith 1996, 1999; Wisner *et al.* 2012; Galaz 2014). Vietnam is seriously affected by climate change with sea levels which have risen by 20 centimeters and an average temperature which has increased by seven degrees Celsius, over the last 50 years (Reliefweb, Oct. 5, 2011).<sup>8</sup>

In October 2013, typhoon Nari, Storm number 11 (*Bão số 11*), slammed into the central coastal areas of Vietnam as one of the more recent storms by which the area has been hit (see e.g. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, Dec. 26, 2017). Before approaching Vietnam, Nari had killed 13 people and displaced more than 43,000 persons in the Philippines (Reliefweb 2013). While Nari caused material harm, it was not as severe a storm as expected; not only had it lost force on its way to Vietnam from the Philippines, it had even bent off to travel north where it eventually took landfall at the Vietnamese Chinese border (*Weather Underground*, Nov. 10, 2013).

Super typhoon Haiyan (known in the Philippines as Yolanda) was expected to slam into Vietnam in early November 2013. This was a particularly feared storm due to the trace of mass destruction it had left behind in the Philippines where it took landfall on 7 November 2013.<sup>9</sup> As a mitigation strategy, the Vietnamese government had evacuated almost 900,000 people from exposed coastal areas including Long Lanh. While a Category 5 storm when wreaking havoc in the Philippines, Haiyan was downgraded to a Category 1 storm when sweeping across Vietnam. Yet, the storm killed 13 persons, injured 81, and caused severe material damage in Vietnam (Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Nov. 12, 2013; *Weather Underground*, Nov. 10, 2013).

Durian was a 'terrible' and 'very frightening' storm, which teared into central and southern Vietnam in November 2006 to kill at least 46 people and sink hundreds of fishing boats (*The New York Times*, Nov. 5, 2006). In Long Lanh, Durian ripped apart homes, destroyed boats, and killed inhabitants; fishermen lost their life when they were caught by the extreme waves and unable to return to the shore. Though, memories about typhoon Linda, in particular, have made a strong imprint on the individual and social body in Long Lanh. On 2 November 1997, typhoon Linda hit southern Vietnam with great force and killed almost 500 persons, injured 800–900 people, disappeared more than 3,200 persons, sunk more than 3,000 boats, and destroyed more than 200,000 houses (Reliefweb Nov. 14, 1997).

The Anthropocene has provoked new levels of human vulnerability and insecurity especially in the Global South, as illuminated by a conspicuous imbalance in the extent to which the Global South vis-à-vis the Global North is confronted with climate disasters and their negative impacts (Enarson *et al.* 2007; MacGregor 2017).<sup>10</sup> While vulnerabilities, hazards, and risks are produced by the Anthropocene these should not divert our attention from socio-economic and political inequalities already in place regardless of the Anthropocene, as ‘the main sources of social influence over hazards’ (Hewitt 1983: 7).<sup>11</sup>

## Climate Disaster, Vulnerability, and Resilience

A focus on vulnerability in the study of climate disaster, Ben Wisner and colleagues argue (2003: 11), concerns ‘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’. A vulnerability perspective on disasters directs our attention towards the non-technical impact of a climate disaster (Bradshaw 2013). This is a perspective which also tends to focus on what people cannot do and thereby imply that those who are suffering from the ramifications of a disaster are in need of being ‘instructed, led and managed’ (Fordham *et al.* 2013: 8).

Resilience has been introduced into disaster research as a notion by which local capabilities can be identified and stimulated. Referring to their studies in post-tsunami southern Thailand, Jonathan Rigg *et al.* (2008), for example, describe how local residents were able to manage their shattered lives with the resources available to overcome immediate hardship and thus illustrate how survivors of a disaster did not fall into passivity and victimhood. While emphasizing local activity and ability to adjust to extraordinary and socially askew conditions, a resilience approach at the same time runs the risk of striking an over-optimistic tone regarding local capacities to overcome and adjust to disaster ruptures (Oliver-Smith 1996, 1999; Wisner *et al.* 2003; Steffen *et al.* 2007).

Adopting a vulnerability perspective on climate disasters, the United Nations stresses that ‘women always tend to suffer most from the impact of disasters’ (UN/ADPC 2010: 8). In a similar vein, Elaine Enarson (quoted in Bradshaw 2013:9) identifies more than twenty indicators including low-income status, men’s violence, and the need for pre-natal care which render women particularly vulnerable during times of disasters. In her study of Hurricane Katrina and the aftermath of the 2010–2011 earthquakes in New Orleans, USA, Jacqui True (2013) highlights how gender inequality embedded in the social fabric was augmented and further injustice created, for instance, manifested as men’s violence against women in the domestic sphere (see also Fordham 2011; MacGregor 2017).

A crisis of emergency ignited by a catastrophe intersects with other types of pre-catastrophic life defining crises conditions such as unemployment, health problems, debt, and abuse which might be fueled and transmuted into long-term challenges (Bradshaw 2013; Stoler 2013). Yet, a climate catastrophe tends to be studied as a period of extreme difficulty to be coped with by people and dealt with by emergency management.

Understood as a momentarily parenthesis of daily life, normalcy is expected to be re-established as soon as possible.

My data suggest, however, that a crisis of emergency is volatile as a phenomenon, an experience, and as a political construction. A crisis perpetually changes in modality, intensity, and temporality by metamorphosing between various crisis characteristics including crisis as a breakdown of the usual order of things; an event that can be resolved and overcome; an interference which provides an option for renewal and betterment (i.e. *catharsis*) (Roitman 2014; Walby 2015); and a moment which turns chronic by creating a new context (Vigh 2008) of what I refer to as a disordered order of slow harm.

Various crises phases cannot be understood as exclusive of one another. Rather, they should be seen as intimately intertwined forces, which simultaneously condition deterioration and redemption for human being and becoming, before, during, and after a climate catastrophe (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 2000). Focusing on the interaction of various types of crises embedded in a climate disaster helps us to avoid conflating the destruction of a crisis of emergency caused by storms and flooding with socio-economic antecedents already framing local life, such as the patriliney (King and Stone 2010) which allows for particular types of gendered crises both at the level of the household and society.

## A Fisherman's World

'The sea determines our lives and is always on our minds', Hang pointed out and was in doing so underscoring how the sea is a critical source for a number of livelihoods in Long Lanh, above all fishing. As a maritime community, Long Lanh is a fisherman's world. The occupation of fishing is mostly held by male inhabitants who also are the owners of the fishing vessels or roundabout boats, or they are boat lodgers. A roundabout boat means individual work, while a vessel is large enough to take teams onboard, which typically would consist of men only. Women occasionally work on the boats as short-term crew if no other employment options were to be found. Men leave with their boats early in the morning or late in the evening and while most boats return within twelve hours, some of the larger vessels might be at sea for days, weeks, or even for months.

Early in the morning, the boats return to the shore at the landmark of the cluster of Phuong trees. Here, the catch is collected, sold, and distributed. Shimmering fish pile up under the shade of large umbrellas, while watched over by observant woman traders. On display, the catch is critically inspected by potential buyers and if bought, the fish are likely to end up in the local fishing industry, where female employees clean and pack the fish or prepare special products such as fermented fish sauce and dried fish. The morning trade on the shore usually is completed around 9 o'clock, as this is the time when the sun gains power, the sand starts to burn, the fish begin to smell, and the swarms of flies multiply.

Maritime life shapes a certain kind of masculinity in Long Lanh at an individual and collective level (see King and Stone 2010; Hearn 2015). It is a masculinity defined by the

livelihood of fishing, the sociality shared by men on the boats, and the grandness of the ocean. As one of the more affluent residents in Long Lanh, Cuong owns the house in which he lives with his family, the land on which the house is built, and several boats. Thus familiar with the life of a boat owner including bureaucratic matters such as registration of boats and fishing license procedures, Cuong takes great pride in his experiences as a fisherman:

I used to be the best fisherman here. I was never afraid of going out during the storms [...]. I used to be best at going out fishing. The younger men are not as experienced [...]. When I went fishing, sometimes we [i.e. Cuong and his team] didn't go home for up to two months. After fishing, we came back to sell the fish but then we went straight back to the sea. I just met my wife briefly on the shore. Many fishermen come home to stay with their wife, but not me. If I stayed at home for a couple of days, I felt an urge to make more money [...]. Before, when I went fishing, I went very far [...] and spent months at sea.

Cuong has recently retired from life at sea after arguments with his wife who thought he spent too much of the income earned from fishing on beers and card playing (i.e. gambling). Fishing as a livelihood is indistinguishably from local ideas about masculinity. When men work in teams of 4–10 on the vessels they 'need to stick together', as Duc another local fisherman emphasized. In this sense, Duc explained, boat teams resemble military platoons and the brotherhood found in the army; men work in shifts on the boats, share the burden of work, exchange thoughts, fight storms side by side, and when back on land, they spend money in bars and cafés on drinking, gambling, and sometimes even on sex (cf. Nguyen-vo 2008; Horton and Rydstrom 2011).

A group of fishermen had gathered near the cluster of Phuong trees in the early afternoon for a routinely boat and fishing license inspection with the local authorities. When ready with the formalities, the atmosphere became cheerful and the men were laughingly joking with one another about the passion they feel for their boats and the devotedness and time it takes. Though, Vu pointed out, 'we love the sea and we love our boats, but we love our wives more than our boats'. Yet, the boats are held high, as is the lifestyle allowed for by a mesmerizing ocean. In a poetic moment at his daughter's wedding Minh, for instance, told me how he loves being at sea especially in the middle of the night. Alone in his boat under the shining stars, Minh would often sing in a high pitched voice, which, as he demonstrated at the party, is both deep and stunning (despite a somewhat drunken touch on that particular occasion).


## Patrilineal Order

'We are more traditional, we are a fishing community, so the patriarch [*gia/tộc trưởng*] is important here', one of the Long Lanh men, Chau, told. The 'pillar of the house' (*trụ cột gia đình*; literally the pillar of the family) is a role which the most senior male of a household is supposed to hold. Gender provides an analytical lens for critical assessments of how socio-cultural logics stimulate the fabrication of particular images, narratives, and practices in regard to men and women. My data, however, encourage a focus on the ways in which masculinity in a patrilineal world assigns men with privileges and powers that shape daily life (cf. Butler 2004; Petersson and Runyan 2013). A masculinity

approach offers an analytical entry point to the study of the crafting of femaleness and maleness and the ways in which a crisis caused by a climate disaster capitalizes on stereotypes about masculinity and femininity as these binary oppositions subscribe to the roles of men and women (Louie and Low 2003; Trinh 2008; Hearn 2015).

A patrilineal and heterosexual family organization remains common in Vietnamese society despite a recent increase in same-sex partnership, single-headed households, and co-habitation prior to marriage (Newton 2012; Braemer 2014; Horton 2014; Rydstrom 2016; Nguyen 2015). The continuation of the patrilineage is critical and male progeny is appreciated. As ‘inside lineage’ (*họ nội*), sons enjoy privileges and powers which daughters do not. Descent traced along the male line means that daughters come to stand in a position of exteriority to the patrilineage as ‘outside lineage’ (*họ ngoài*) (Rydstrom 2003a, 2003b; see also Sandgren 2009). These roles are empowering and at the same time challenging because, as Douglas Schrock and Michael Schwalbe (2009: 279–280) explain, ‘males – if they are to do their part in maintaining men as the dominant gender group and if they wish to enjoy the privileges that come from membership of that group – must signify possession of a masculine self’.

## Masculinities and Femininities

In the Vietnamese context, masculinity and femininity are rendered meaningful as a conglomerate of references to ‘physiology’ (*sinh lý*  *học*), ‘psychology’ (*tâm lý*), and a person’s ‘character’ (*tính cách*). Male bodies are associated with the forces of *Dương* (Yang in Chinese) and female bodies with the forces of *Âm* (Yin in Chinese). The forces of *Dương* are thought to make a man ‘hot’ (*nóng*; also meaning bad tempered), while a female body is considered to be ‘cold’ (*lạnh*) due to the forces of *Âm* (see also Jamieson 1993; Sandgren 2009).

Naturally ‘hot’ bodies are associated with active and centripetal energies, or masculinity, and ‘cold’ bodies with passive and centrifugal energies, or femininity. Ideally, these two forces would complement one another and foster harmony in the household and by extension in society (Jamieson 1993; Ngo 2004; Leshkovich 2008). Women are expected to remain calm to avoid the rice from ‘boiling’ (*sôi*); a euphemism for how women are supposed to prevent their male partner from being ‘enraged’ (or ‘mad’; *nổi khùng*) and maybe even abusive.

The ways in which women and men are assumed to adjust to certain images of femininity and masculinity was illustrated by Ha, who works in the fishing industry in Long Lanh, when she on a sunny afternoon told ‘we, women, should always endure, so there will be no conflicts [...]. All women here are miserable. We have to endure to keep our home peaceful [i.e. to prevent conflicts and violence]’. Because of one’s husband and children, Ha explained, a woman is expected to maintain peace within the household. A patrilineal organization of society and the ways in which it allows for the configuration of masculinity and femininity impede equal recognition of women by providing ‘openings towards violence [and] towards misogyny’ (Connell 1987: 185–186).

Women’s ontologically defined inferiority in the patriliney might be balanced through a sociality of femininity demonstrated through the practicing of *tình cảm* and the many



dimensions by which it is composed including showing ‘respect’ (*kính*), ‘self-denial’ (*nhường*), ‘endurance’ (*chịu*), and ‘holding back oneself’ (*nhịn*). While *tình cảm* also is a quality appreciated in men, living with *tình cảm* becomes conditional for girls and women as a means by which their ‘good morality’ (*đạo đức tốt*) can be verified and the asymmetrical reciprocity inherent to the patrilineal organization of social life navigated.<sup>12</sup> *Tình cảm* thus produces a certain kind of femininity supposed to facilitate ‘Happy and Harmonious Family Life’ (*gia đình hạnh phúc hòa thuận*), which is expected to prevent discord and violence (Rydstrom 2003b, 2009, 2017).

Even though not all men adhere to a pervasive version of masculinity, or embody it, and may engage with alternative masculinities, a predominant heterosexual masculinity provides an influential socio-culturally framework for the configuration of maleness and femaleness (Horton & Rydstrom 2011; Hearn 2015). Thus, men are under pressure to confirm to particularly influential ideas about men, maleness, and masculinity and women to certain assumptions about women, femaleness, and femininity. By engaging with specific images and narratives about maleness and masculinity, men contribute to the (re-)production of a heterosexual hegemonic masculinity understood as ‘a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes’ (Connell 1987: 184).

### Crisis of Emergency

A crisis of emergency such as an incoming storm brings about ‘severe impairment, as of one’s health, fortune, honor, or hopes’ (Stoler 2013: 11). Etymologically, the word crisis stems from Greek and refers to ‘a turning point in a disease’ (Etymology Dictionary 2018). Crisis thus indicates a spatio-temporary parenthesis which interrupts the rhythm of daily life; as a period which it is necessary to go through to return to ordinary life, maybe even under improved conditions. For Mai and her family, storms are events with which it is possible to cope. Together with her family, Mai lives near one of the recently constructed roads in a newly built white washed two-story house.

‘Storms occur and are unwanted’, Mai matter-of-factly observed, ‘but people have to cope with them’. When a storm is forecasted, ‘people begin to store food [and] all family members have to unite to fight the storm. Men do the heavy tasks such as strengthening the houses, take care of the boats and bring them to a safe place. Women tidy up the house and prepare the food’. As a consequence of this division of labor, men and boys do not only try to bring the boats to a safe spot when a storm is ruining, they even dodge evacuation. Nghia, a representative of the Fishermen’s Union thus noted that young men ‘are devoted to protect their homes and boats’.

Younger men are eager to demonstrate courageousness, according to Loi, a representative of the People’s Committee, and they therefore engage in risky behavior during storms. Due to what authorities see as lack of experience and poor judgement, young men are unable to predict the hazards when a storm is harassing and rush to the shore to save their boats regardless of whirling trees, branches, and objects. Van, a social worker from Long Lanh, remembered with horror how a man from the local community had been gruesomely executed by a hovering roof, which the extreme

winds of typhoon Dorian had swiveled around. Storms are dangerous and in the view of local officials, young men throw caution to the wind by not recognizing the experiences of older generations who are painfully aware of the losses which the community has suffered due to past storms (see Das 2000).

When the Dorian typhoon hit Long Lanh in 2006, 'roofs were lifted and houses were destroyed', Hoa told. As if she were speaking directly to official safety concerns regarding storms, Hoa remembered: 'My eldest son had to stay on the shore with his boat to save it from sinking. The winds were very hard. He was hit in his head by a hovering door and lost consciousness'. Grateful that her son is still alive, Hoa recognized that things could have gone much worse. Losing one's boat means losing one's livelihood, which is the light in which men's protection of their boats in the midst of cataclysmic weather should be seen. That men, and especially younger men, remain on the shore during storms to protect their boats also implies that official security concerns have not yet translated fully into a mitigation strategy designed to even secure the valuable and dearly held boats.

In the fall of 2013, when super typhoon Haiyan took off from the Philippines and headed towards the central-southern parts of Vietnam, Vietnamese authorities were predicting 'a very horrible' storm. Mai thus recalled how inhabitants had 'rush[ed] to buy nails and materials to strengthen their houses [and] cope with the storm'. Prepared for the storm, Mai and her family had barricaded themselves in their house:

We closed our house tightly and stayed inside and looked through the chink in the door. The wind howled frantically. Leaves flew rapidly and the waves were huge. But we have a solid house, so we did not have to worry. It went on for about a day or so, then it was over. We did not care about the heavy rain.

Protected by their newly built sound house, Mai and her family were safe while the storm ruptured outside, fortunately in less damaging ways than at first predicted by the weather forecast.

## Renewal

For Luan and his family Nari, the storm which arrived about a month prior to Haiyan, was a destructive experience which, however, also opened a path to renewal. Local authorities, Luan told, 'had spread information about evacuation in loudspeakers, saying that families who did not have solid houses should evacuate'. Even if the authorities had not ordered people to evacuate their unsafe houses, Luan and his family would have left anyway, because their 'house was not strong enough for the storm'. Luan's wife, adult son and his son's family (i.e. wife and two young daughters) therefore went to a relative's house for safety during the storm. In the meanwhile, as Luan explained, 'my father and I stayed to consolidate the house'. Using steel wire, the two men had tied up the house, hoping the wire would strengthen the construction and prevent the house from being torn apart.

Not unlike the division of labor seen in other families, also in Luan's case the senior men were in charge of strengthening the house. Being in charge speaks to larger understandings of masculinity and the responsibilities associated with the man in a family,

who is recognized as the ‘Pillar of the House’. The role as the ‘Pillar of the House’ is imbued with expectations about the demonstration of masculinity and accentuated in times of peril, insecurity, and precariousness. Sang, another Long Lanh fisherman, thus explained that because his house could not resist the storm, ‘I had to rush home to evacuate my family. Because I’m a man, I can handle the whole thing better than my wife and kids’.

When Luan’s family returned to their house, the ruination of the home was obvious as the ‘roof had blown away and the doors were broken’. A breakdown in the aftermath of a typhoon materializes as immediate ramifications which need to be taken care of through management and rebuilding so life can be brought back to how it used to be (Godfrey & Torres 2016). Because of their savings, Luan and his family were able to deal with the crisis of emergency caused by the storm and even improve their house. After retiring as a soldier in the army, Luan has had various occupations such as working in a state-owned enterprise and as a welder. Thanks to a stable income, Luan and his family could afford to renovate their destroyed house.

The Anthropocene and a recent surge in the number of storms is a matter of huge concern to Long Lanh authorities, who continuously attempt to improve local disaster mitigation and coping strategies. More traditional methods have been revised and even revoked, as Huy from the People’s Committee explained, because ‘old people think they can read the tea leaves [*đọc lá trà*] and predict the weather’. However, such methods are not valid any longer, he stressed, because ‘the climate has changed and the area has experienced much more storms than in the past’.

Today, all wards are obliged to develop a warning system and a coping strategy which must be implemented when a storm is forecasted. As a gender specific measure, the authorities are particularly attentive to single female headed households when a storm is approaching, as these are thought to be in ample need of manpower to strengthen their house. They are thus offered support by volunteers or the army (of which the majority is men) to prepare their home for an incoming storm.

As yet another kind of mitigation strategy, a white marble statue of Lady Buddha (Bodhisattva of Mercy or Mother of Compassion) was built. Raised at the highest point in the area, the remarkable statue overlooks the sea. When Nari eventually changed its trajectory to travel north where it took landfall, prayers for divine protection obviously were heard, I was told by inhabitants including officials. Fishermen caught in the storms could return safely and no one was harmed from yet another catastrophe (cf. Merli 2012).

## **Crisis as Context**

### ***Fighting the Odds***

In disrupting coherency and augmenting uncertainty for future prospects (Habermas 1992 [1976]), a climate disaster might change from a sudden ‘state of emergency’ (Benjamin 1999 [1968]) into a situation of ‘ahistorical permanence’ (Bhabha 1994). Living amongst the ruins could become the new normal in the sense that ‘the crisis consists

precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear' (Gramsci 1971: 275–276). By engaging with other types of crises, a crisis of emergency changes in modality, intensity, and temporality and might, in doing so, morph into a more chronic condition (Vigh 2008).

Together with her children, brother, and ailing parents (Mother, who is in her 80-ies and Father, who is in his 90-ies), Giang lives in a small, rather dark, modest house. While sitting in the main room of the house at the old table next to a short-legged wooden bed and a rusty bicycle, Giang told how her life has been defined by a violent husband. She is haunted by memories about a petrifying relationship, which in her words meant, 'I was beaten seriously by my husband. Right after we got married, I gave birth [i.e. to the couple's first child]. Then he started having extramarital affairs'. When Giang, as she described it, began to 'grumble/complain' (*càm rànm*) about her husband's affairs, he would beat her. Whenever women in the Vietnamese context 'grumble', it is generally taken as an unwillingness and inability to adhere to expectations about women's role as creators of harmony in the household through the demonstration of *tình cảm* (see Rydstrom 2003b, 2017).

Women who do not act with *tình cảm* are seen as unable to balance a 'hot' partner's temper. Such perceived feminine 'shortcomings' are frequently taken as justification for a man's beating of his wife by men, women, and sometimes even by official representatives (Rydstrom 2003b, 2017; Kwiatkowski 2008, 2011). Giang thus explained that her 'grumbling' was the reason for her husband's infliction of harm upon her and, moreover, violation of Vietnamese laws which prohibit any use of violence in the household and beyond (Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control 2007; Law on Marriage and Family of 2000; Penal Code of 1999). Giang thus recalled:

He beat me a lot, he beat me so I became black and blue [...]: he kicked me, he choked me, and beat me until my face turned black and blue. So, in the middle of the night, I went to my parents' house with my baby. I had to go home [to my parents] because I was beaten too much. He beat me a lot!

Despite the abuse to which Giang was subjected by her husband, she returned to live with him and the couple had two more children. A growing family did not end the violence, though. Giang's husband remained engaged in extramarital relations and conflicts frequently erupted between the couple, escalating to the point where Giang was beaten by her husband. Caught in a 'Zone of Exception' (Agamben 1998; Mbembe 2003) where the laws prohibiting violence do not apply in practice, the relationship turned into a state defined by permanent crisis (see Rydstrom 2017). A last time came, though, on the day when Giang and her three children fled to her parents' house to never move back (see also Das 2000).

The expanded household, however, struggled to make ends meet and feed the many mouths. Giang's old parents were too fragile to work and there was no economic support from Giang's husband to count on for raising the three young children. Over the years, Giang has been taking various odd jobs for the family to survive including cleaning, working in the fishing industry, and even joining the fishing teams of men on the vessels. Despite Giang's efforts to increase the family's income, the household has

been classified as ‘poor’ (*nhà nghèo*) by the authorities thus indicating that there is no steady income to count on in daily life or any savings to rely on in an emergency situation.

After the 2009 typhoon, the province to which Long Lanh belongs, took various initiatives to combat men’s violence against women. The Women’s Union and the Law Center thus launched the campaign ‘Say No to Violence’ (*Nói Không với bạo Lực*). The campaign targeted both perpetrators and survivors in households suffering from violence (see Rydstrom 2017).<sup>13</sup> According to my data, these households were offered a reward of 500,000 Vietnamese Dong (about 22 USD) provided the violence would be terminated. Even other means were implemented to end men’s violence against their female partner. Competitions about ‘who knows what about domestic violence’ were held, roleplays on violence performed, and events focusing on violence were organized to engage citizens in the combat of male-to-female violence. Even punitive means of increased gravity would be employed; hence, a perpetrator would first be warned; second fined; third referred to a re-education center (*trung tâm giáo dưỡng*), and fourth interned at a mental hospital (*bệnh viện tâm thần*).<sup>14</sup>

### ***Crisis Modalities, Intensities, and Temporalities***

When a crisis of emergency interacts with pre-crisis inequalities, a rupturing crisis such as a storm does not necessarily lead to renewal and amelioration but might as well result in a protracted period of difficulties. By intersecting with gendered inequalities existing prior to the disaster, a crisis of emergency might transform into an abiding new condition, which perpetuates experiences of loss of stability and possibilities and, in doing so, truncates human agency (cf. Vigh 2008; Stoler 2013).

For families like Giang’s, Nari became a socio-economic tipping point (see also Peluso and Watts 2001). Giang and her family tried to strengthen their house and save valuable items before the house was torn apart by the aggressive winds. To make matters worse, Giang’s old father was hurt during the storm, because

he was inside the house when the strong wind ripped off the roof and everything collapsed. My brother and father wanted to strengthen the roof and my father was almost killed. He got trapped and could not get his arm free [from the ruins], so my son had to pull his grandfather out of the collapsed house.

The old man’s hand suffered a severe cut, but travelling to a health care clinic during the storm was impossible and would mean an unwelcome expense, which the family could not afford. Determined to save money by curing his wounds himself, rather than seeking professional help, Giang’s father waited for the storm to pass and then went to the pharmacy for medicine.

Located below sea level, the family’s house and yard inevitably are flooded during storms and heavy rain. The family, nevertheless, stayed put during the storm because Giang’s father was anxious to leave the house unguarded. Refusing to escape to an evacuation center, he had argued that ‘if all people leave for the evacuation center, something might happen with their houses’. For Giang there was no choice, because

my father and mother did not go, so I could not go either. I could not leave when my parents were staying, so none of us went to the evacuation place. We decided to live and die together [...]. We stayed in our collapsing house; we were hiding under the [ancestor] altar.

After having watched from the front row how the storm ruptured their house, the family inspected the ruins of what used to be their home. Parts of the house needed to be rebuilt, especially a wall and the roof, and the family hoped for governmental support to cover the costly reconstruction. 'At first', Giang told, 'the authorities said they would support us with 500,000 Dong [i.e. Vietnamese Dong, app. 22 USD], but later they only gave us 300,000 Dong [i.e. app. 13 USD], 10 kg of rice, and a box of instant noodles'.<sup>15</sup>

The support did not provide much of a help, though, as the family had no savings to chip in and was, therefore, dependent on public help. Due to economic constraints, the family was unable to buy the materials needed to rebuild the destroyed house. As Giang remembered, there

was nothing to do but to go from house to house to ask neighbors if we could buy corrugated iron sheets which had blown off their houses, because that was cheaper [than procuring new material]. We bought some planks and some old corrugated iron sheets.

With the collected second-hand material, Giang's father, brother, and son restored the house as much as possible. However, the collapsed wall has not been fully reconstructed and the repaired roof gives a rudimentary and frail impression.

A gender-specific crisis of the past provoked by the brutal harm to which Giang was subjected by her husband fueled an economic crisis of the present for Giang and her household. While differing in temporality and modality, these crises experiences and conditions interlock with a crisis of emergency inflicted by a recent storm. Ruining the family's home, the storm intensified the economic crisis with which the family already was struggling and thus fortified the family's exhaustion.

## Conclusions

A crisis perspective allows us to unfold the tempo-spatial gendered modalities of the Anthropocene and its entanglements with other types of socio-economic crises conditions. While a disaster hits societies and people with an immediate abruptness, the episodic suddenness might for some transform into an elongated experience of difficulties which makes the horizon of possibilities opaque. The ramifications of the Anthropocene are socially uneven and truly gendered, as epitomized by Giang's story, which also elucidates how men's violence against their female partner is allowed for by masculinity ideals produced within the patriliney.

The storms by which coastal Vietnam and thus Long Lanh are hit with increased frequency bring to the fore how a climate disaster generates various types of crises including crisis as a state of emergency, as an avenue to renewal, and as chronicity. While differing in character, each type of crisis takes shape as the result of gender-specific conditions in the local community.

When life is framed by various kinds of socio-economic crises, a sudden ruination brought by a storm can provoke paramount challenges. In this sense, a storm

inflicted crisis of emergency junctures to various degree and with varied intensity with other types of crises. For those who already found themselves in a precarious socio-economic situation prior to the catastrophe, fully recuperation from a sudden crisis of emergency is hindered and might even be impossible.

Crisis is volatile as a phenomenon, as an experience, and as a political construction and might in being so transmute from urgency into persistent hardship; into a new context defined by disordered order, which, by continuously ruining lifeworlds, livelihoods, and ecologies, inflicts slow harm upon people, their living conditions, and environment.

Yet, no crisis is static due to its pending nature and incorporation of forces of renewal and ruination and thus dynamics of agency and change. Climate disasters in the era of the Anthropocene are configured as complex relationships between humans, society, culture, and environment which together foster conditions that result in precariousness and vulnerability as well as resilience and resolutions.

## Notes

1. The United Nation's International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR 2009: 9) defines a disaster as 'a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources'. At least one of the following criteria must be met for a disaster to be entered into the UNISDR database: (1) a report of 10 or more people killed; (2) a report of 100 people affected; (3) a declaration of a state of emergency by the relevant government; (4) a request by the national government for international assistance (Bradshaw 2013: 3).
2. Rather than seeing a crisis of chronicity as an oxymoronically 'ordered disorder', as referred to by Henrik Vigh (2008) and Janet Roitman (2014), I understand the rupturing powers of a crisis of chronicity as 'disordered order', which, by continuously ruining lifeworlds and livelihoods, imposes 'slow harm' upon people, their living conditions, and local ecologies.
3. My focus is on women and men but the negative impacts of climate disasters are further differentiated along the lines of age, ethnicity, sexuality, bodyableness, and class.
4. My broader analysis is informed by ethnographic data gathered during various periods of anthropological fieldwork conducted in Vietnam. From 1994 to 1995, I carried out fieldwork in a northern rural commune, which I call Thinh Tri, to study gender socialization (e.g. Rydstrom 2003a, 2009). During a second period of fieldwork in Thinh Tri, from 2000 to 2001, I focused on violence and sexuality in an inter-generational perspective (e.g. Rydstrom 2003b, 2013). In 2004, 2006, 2012–2013, and 2016, I carried out fieldwork in the larger region of Hanoi and in a northern semi-rural area, which I refer to as Quang Vinh, to study gender and violences. From 2004 to 2011, I was Swedish coordinator of the Rural Families in Transitional Vietnam project under the frame of which ethnographic and sociological data were collected in 1100 households in the North, Center, and South of Vietnam. These various research projects have been funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet), and the Swedish Foundation for Humanities and Social Sciences (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond). For the Swedish Research Council funded study on 'Climate Disaster and Gendered Violence in Asia', I conducted fieldwork in 2015 in central coastal Vietnam in the community, which I call Long Lanh, and thus returned to an area where my research had led me earlier (e.g. Luan *et al.* 2008, 2011). This material includes 35 in-depth interviews with Long Lanh men and women (ages 20–65) as well as same-sex focus group interviews with local inhabitants and interviews with



representatives of the Province and Long Lanh Women's Union; the Long Lanh Farmer and Fishermen Unions; Long Lanh Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA); the Province and Long Lanh People's Committee; and the Province Teacher Training College. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to about 50 men (ages 20–65) and 50 women (ages 20–65) on disaster, gender, and violence. The data, furthermore, include observations in the community and communication with Vietnamese scholars, activists, and agencies. In addition, a follow-up fieldwork was carried out in Long Lanh in 2017 of which Huong T. Nguyen was in charge while a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow in the 'Climate Disasters and Gendered Violence in Asia' project. This fieldwork offers a project point of reference with 12 in-depth interviews with men (ages 20–65) on climate disasters, livelihood, and masculinity as well as observations and communication with Vietnamese activists and organizations. The Long Lanh fieldwork material also draws on secondary sources, official reports, and other types of data such as legislation and media debates. Comparing ethnographic project data from Vietnam and the Philippines also has enhanced the analysis (see Nguyen and Rydstrom 2018). For anonymity reasons, all personal names and places referred to in this article are pseudonyms.

5. While Bruno Latour (2014) refers to the notion of the Anthropocene as a 'poisonous gift' for the social sciences, the Anthropocene is useful as a conceptual lens for reconsidering the relationship between humans, other species, and the Earth. In a special issue on the Anthropocene (Ethnos 2015, Donna Haraway and her colleagues 2015) critically consider the analytical and ethnographic dimensions of the Anthropocene. Here, I use the notion as an indication of registered and emergent climate changes which result in various disasters including storms.
6. Climate change is defined by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as 'a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods' (quoted in UNISDR 2009: 7).
7. For further details on climate change, see Victor Galaz (2014: 3) and UNDP Asia and the Pacific (2018).
8. The impact of climate change on the economy and livelihood is recognized by the Vietnamese government and its agencies such as the Vietnam Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment (IMHEN) under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. The Vietnamese Government has signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. In this spirit, a national strategy on natural disaster control to 2020 was approved by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung in November 2007. About a year later, on 2 December 2008, the Prime Minister ratified a national coping program for climate change (Government of Vietnam, Decision 158/2008/QD-TTg). The Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment is in charge of the national climate change coping and management program (Reliefweb Oct 5, 2011).
9. In the Philippines, super typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) killed more than 6,000 people and displaced more than 4 million persons (Reliefweb 2013). On Haiyan, see for example Huong T. Nguyen (2018).
10. Disasters of a certain level of intensity are recognized as hazards. Hazards are dangerous conditions due to which lives are lost and people are injured while property and livelihoods are damaged. For details see Sara Bradshaw (2013) and UNISDR (2009).
11. The disastrous impact of the wars in which Vietnam has been involved on people and the environment falls beyond the focus of this article (see Rydstrom 2013).
12. On asymmetrical reciprocity, see Emmanuel Lévinas (1979) and Iris M. Young (1997).
13. See Penal Code No. 15/1999/QH10 (Art. 104) for details on the 11% infirmity rate and definitions of harmful acts (see also Rydstrom 2017).
14. A discussion of the juridical status of perpetrators is relevant but is beyond the scope of this article.
15. All numbers are referred to in 2018 rates.



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