CITIES IN A CHANGING WORLD:
QUESTIONS OF CULTURE, CLIMATE AND DESIGN

• Paper / Proposal Title:
Designing cities for dignified commuting: Watersheds of hope in Metro Manila, Philippines' traffic situation

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• Abstract (300 words):
The cities of the Global South are facing enormous urban transport challenges. Traffic congestion chokes most of their arteries as roads are normally clogged with cars and motorcycles. This is the case in Metro Manila, the capital of the Philippines, where traffic is a top concern of daily urban life for millions of Filipinos. However, the Philippine government approaches the problem of traffic congestion mainly from an economic and infrastructural vantage point. Government technocrats (or what is popularly known as “economic managers”), politicians, and private investors design solutions largely through the construction of infrastructure projects that are highly car-centric. Furthermore, they view transport provision as a business opportunity instead of a public service. Through my interviews with representatives from Philippine government transport agencies, the private sector, and transport reform advocacy groups as well as an autoethnographic account of the transport situation around Metro Manila, I explore solutions that design cities and transport policies around the principle of dignified commuting. Such principle brings at the forefront of transport planning the importance of a safe, reliable, and efficient transport system. It moves towards the commoning of streets and transport infrastructure through the watersheds of hope ushered by proactive
individuals and organizations who advocate for the rights of public transport commuters, cyclists, and pedestrians for a dignified transport system. It envisions designing cities as sites for the articulation of convivial relations, rather than just a passive site for frictionless traffic flow, infrastructural development, and top-down interventions. The campaigns for bicycle lanes, the allocation of designated and standardized foot paths, and an efficient public transport system render the co-making of the urban transport system as a shared project among Metro Manila's diverse constituents. In this way, there can be hopeful possibilities for the flourishing of cities in the Global South.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Gina Rocafort Gatarin is the first PhD candidate from the Institute for Culture and Society of Western Sydney University in Australia to be in the joint PhD program in Sustainable Environment and Well-being of the University of Ferrara in Italy. Her research is fully funded by the Australian Government Research Training Program. Her PhD thesis engages with the political and cultural dimensions of finding solutions to the traffic problem in Metro Manila, Philippines. Her research interests include urban studies, development, and social justice. Before doing her PhD, she was a Senior Field Manager at the Innovations for Poverty Action where she helped implement data collection from thousands of Filipino ultra-poor households. She was also an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology of the University of the Philippines-Diliman. She engaged in several projects with the Asian Development Bank, the British Council, the Asian Institute of Management, and the Ateneo School of Government. Gina finished her MA in Development Studies (with merit and with Research Paper Distinction) from the International Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands and a BA in Sociology (magna cum laude) from the University of the Philippines-Diliman.