



Episode 4 with Daryll Delgado

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Note: *Transcripts may contain errors so we encourage you to listen to the audio, which convey emphasis and feelings that are not apparent in the text. Oh, and don't forget to cite the Institute for Climate and Sustainable Cities and the Agam Agenda for any quotes taken from the transcript. Enjoy!*

Padma Hi, I'm Padma Perez, co-host for Agam the climate podcast. Today we're joined by Daryll Delgado, one of the contributing authors for the book, *Agam: Filipino Narratives on Uncertainty and Climate Change*. Daryll is also the Manager of Verite, Southeast Asia. They design and implement multi-country programs, towards understanding and improving working conditions in several sectors that include agriculture, electronics, footwear and food manufacturing, among others. She's also the author of a collection of short stories, *After the Body Displaces Water*, which was published by the University of Santo Tomas Press, and recently, she just came up with her debut novel, entitled *Remains*, which was published by the Ateneo de Naga University Press. Hi Daryll.

Daryll Hello. And thank you for inviting me. I'm very happy to be here.

Padma Thank you for coming and making time for this. First, Daryll, could you describe to our listeners the image that you received?

Daryll It was an image of a man on a bicycle. So, the man looked to me like he just came from somewhere that made him happy. It looked like a typical day for him. So the man was shirtless, he was wearing, you know, like, *pambahay* shorts, and rubber slippers, and the man was looking straight at the camera, to me when I recalled that picture, and, it's kinda inscribed my memory, to be honest. I keep thinking about the man's face and the man's eyes, like it was so, innocent and, it was the look of a person who does not think that things will change the next day, so suddenly. It was a typical day. The look of a person who is confident and assured

about his environment was, I thought, captured very well by that photograph. So, I thought, this is the face that I see, and when I go to communities to do my work, and you know, these are poor communities, they live very challenging lives, and, the fishing community for instance, their life is very, how should I say? Rhythmic almost, there's a pattern, and any disruption in the pattern can really cause a lot of chaos, so, I imagine that a person who is used to a certain rhythm of life and who is able to live a life without disruption would look something like that.

Padma. Right.

Daryll They don't need much. They don't ask for a lot. Just enough for them to be able to sustain that kind of life.

Padma And what was the Agam process [like] for you once you had that photo?

Daryll I remember receiving that photo actually. My friend Nori, he reached out to me, this was way before Haiyan, and told me about this project and asked me to link him to writers in the Visayas who might be interested and I basically just volunteered and said, I want to be part of this. I'm putting my name on the list. But I also gave him other contacts which he did reach out to, and for a while, there was a lull, and then I heard from him again, after Haiyan, so I was assigned this image, and at that time, it was just, it spoke to me. And this poem that I wrote is very atypical of my normal style, and I just really want someone to speak plainly and not speak in metaphors, and so I wanted to approximate that, and yeah. That was the process, and he followed up with me. I remember wanting to say no, and take me out of the project because it was too difficult at that time, after Haiyan, I wasn't convinced that poetry or literature is the right response to be honest, but of course it was because, I was also traumatized, and I was very much involved in emergency response, but after a while I realized, no, this is important. And this is something that I'm really proud of. I wanted to contribute something that's meaningful.

Padma I want to come back to what you said. Because it's something I think, many writers and artists as well probably ask themselves is, "Is this the appropriate response?" and, even I, doing this work, I ask myself that and I just have to believe that it is, so, I'll come back to that later, because I want to talk about that feeling more. So you received a picture of a man, but you wrote in the voice of a woman. Why did you choose that perspective?

Daryll Because, I wanted to use the opportunity to give voice to women. And I remember I was involved in a project in Candahug. So Candahug is a fishing community right at the outskirts of Tacloban, it faces the ocean, it's very close to MacArthur Park, but it's so hidden because that whole area is so beautiful, and then you have to make a deliberate right turn to discover that community. So we went there and the first thing that struck me was, 'Why are there only women here? Where are all the men?' The men had vanished? And because they were fishermen, they secured their wives and their children, and then they went back to secure their boats and their houses and they vanished. They just never returned. It was very interesting because fishing villages, fishing communities, are, based on my experiences, are very gendered. Very patriarchal. Very male-dominated. And here now is a fishing village whose men have vanished. And the women had to take on roles, and, all of a sudden they had to speak for their husbands, and for their community, a role that maybe, they're not very used to, but they just took it on, and it was very interesting to see themselves organizing themselves, assigning roles to each other, taking on leadership positions, and I just realized this was so natural to them, maybe they were just not given an opportunity. But also you could see there was so much pain, and so much difficulty so I thought, the images were of a man, but I wanted a woman's voice, or, wanted a woman to be a persona of that poem.

Padma Do you know how those women in Candahug are, now?

Daryll Yes, we established a very small project, but it was a very small project, but you know, they didn't need very much, they were so organized, amazingly organized, and they knew what they wanted, it was very clear to them so the way we did our project was, to ask for them to be the one to propose. And then when we went back, they did make it work. I must admit I have not gone back for over a year, so, but the last time we did, yeah, they were doing

pretty well, and it was also interesting to see that the younger, their daughters and the sons because they went to school, they had education, and they didn't have to work as fishers anymore, so it gave them some kind of mobility, somehow.

Padma In your novel, *Panawagan* makes an appearance. I was surprised when I was reading it. So where would you place *Agam: Filipino Narratives* in the process of writing your novel?

Daryll Yes, thank you for asking me that question. Because it made me realize that this woman's voice is actually-- she's actually the first character of this novel. But when I think about it, I was writing a totally different novel. I didn't, I didn't set out to write a novel about Yolanda at all. So I had been working on another novel, something I had been working on since 2012. And then, you know, you know how it is. And then I just got stumped somewhere maybe two years ago. And then images kept surfacing. And I just didn't know where to put them. And it was just all over the place. I had to, I just stopped. And then I went back to those images that I thought did not belong, but I wanted them so much to be part of that novel. And then a form or a structure just revealed itself to me. And it was very clear to me that this novel number two, which became novel number one, this novel, number two is going to be about voices, and I recall writing this, this piece, and wanting it to be sort of the grounding of this novel. So yeah. And then I looked at other pieces I had written between 2013 and 2017, and realized that there was a theme running themes through all these things.

Padma Yeah, some of them were blog posts?

Daryll Yeah. And I realized I had written because I had written maybe four other very short stories. And I had been writing them from a, I mean, using a certain style, they were all in first person, but they were all very different characters from each other. But they all occupied sort of the same and I realized, Oh, my God, I have an entire cast of characters already. And what was I thinking trying to force another novel onto them? And they were sort of telling me No, this is how we want to be read about in a way I know, it sounds kind of crazy. But that's how it seemed to me.

Padma It seems that way to a lot of writers. No matter how hard you try to tell your own story, in the end, if you're really listening it's the character that tells you how to write your story.

Daryll It's true. It's the character and, and in my case, in this particular book, it was the form, the structure. I keep going back to that, because it, it really was the form, structure that sort of set me free. Once I decided on that structure, once it became clear to me that this is how the novel is going to be written, then I felt free to talk about so many other things, not just the story of the, like, sort of the main narrator. So yeah... and the structure and character. It's very strange.

Padma However, I want to ask you about that structure as well, I guess we're talking about the same thing. But in between chapters where we're following the main character, you put in transcripts in Waray, that's where Panawagan is. And then translations in English. So how does that-- How did that work into your novel, without giving the story away? Why are the sections there? And what do they do for this story?

Daryll Yes, I was very deliberate about that. I was advised against doing that, actually, because it's, they said, it's too messy. And it disrupts the narrative flow. But I thought that's the point. Yeah, because I didn't want the main character as important as she is to me, the main narrator, I didn't want her to dominate the discourse, the you know, the storytelling, because I felt that wouldn't be true to the politics of the novel. I really wanted to explore notions of voice. And who gets to tell whose story? Yes. And what are the accountabilities of the storyteller? And who, who, who said that, you know, you can speak for other people. And I also realize that I just want to hear them these voices in the book. And it wouldn't seem true if they were not in the local language. So I know I took a risk, kind of like wasting pages in *Waray* that no one will read exactly and my compromise was to include a translation.

Padma Originally you weren't going...

Daryll I wasn't. I really did not want to include any translation.

Padma How come?

Daryll Because the the the intervening voices they are alluded to in the main narrative. Yes. Right. And, and I felt that if I just add enough details in the main narrative, because these are characters that, that the main character encounters in her journey in her search, and I thought that, you know, a reader with enough patience will realize that, oh, this was the character that she was talking about, and then just put two and two together. But again, I had to compromise. I did mind I think translation. It's also interesting, and it kind of adds another layer to the words.

Padma Yeah, yeah, I think it worked. I enjoyed it. And in fact, in the first one was evident. The first one was Panawagan, the first one I committed to read the Waray even if I didn't know if I was reading it correctly, just to get that feeling of, I guess, I'm trying to listen to someone who doesn't speak the same language as you. I think we've all been in situations like that at least once, where you need to try and understand someone who maybe doesn't speak your language, or is just not communicating in a way you're used to being addressed. So I committed to that. And then and then I read the, the translation, and I can't quite describe it, but I think it had an effect on me as a reader, encountering those interruptions, if you would call it that, every now and then. And I think it worked because the transcripts also are part of who the main character is right? So I was intrigued, and I enjoyed it. Thank you. And I'm glad you stood your ground and stuck with Waray.

And one of the reasons it's really interesting to me is I think what it does is it shows us that there's another way to talk about climate change, we don't need to get stuck in the jargon, which again, is a language that very few people speak. So in in the transcripts, I was also reading different people's descriptions of what climate change feels like. It was all about Haiyan. And I remember for a while science was questioning whether... can we already attribute increasing stronger storms to climate change in any way? Later on the findings were that in fact, yes. But I

remember right after Haiyan, that question did come up, like can we say that Haiyan was because of climate change. And that's how I read the transcripts was that these are people's experiences of what it's like, what climate change is, is like. We're not even talking about the future anymore.

Daryll True. It's lived reality.

Padma Yeah. Yeah. And I was thinking, well, if someone who speaks Waray, reads these transcripts, then they might realize that this is what climate change is, you know, it's not. It's not just the 1.5 degrees Celsius, right. And it's not just you know, parts per million. Yes. So speaking of language, and jargon and vocabulary, there were some words that you kept repeating in the novel, I'm not sure I'm going to pronounce them right. So just correct me. But I felt like you were underscoring *dunot* which is decay, right? And *lunop*, which is the storm or--

Daryll Like a devastation wrought by nature.

Padma Okay. And then *linop*.

Daryll Its confusion, dizziness,

Padma And *inop*,

Daryll which is dreams. Yes. Yes.

Padma So why those particular words?

Daryll I mean, of course, a big part of the work is, again, structuring and knowing how to squeeze all of the creative, you know, potential you can get out of certain words, but these are also words that I kept hearing. Throughout the, you know, work in Tacloban and when we talk to people in the aftermath of the typhoon, but also I remember this word *lunop*. I had not heard it for a very long time. And then when someone mentioned it, I realized, “hey, I know that word from childhood”. And whenever I heard that word, I just, I had a mental image always have like, huge dark waves. But I don’t know where that came from, I guess because it was, I don’t know, it was part of people’s consciousness. It’s a really old term. It’s not a common Waray word, but when I heard it spoken, I realized, I know that word. I know what that means. And when I talked to my sisters and my siblings, and we realized that we had recurring nightmares, the same, like I would always have dreams of like inundation flooding, before. Way before, when I was very young, it’s a recurring dream. And I said, this must come from somewhere, it must come from I don’t know, oral narratives, or stories that people told each other, or like, maybe our grandparents stories that we didn’t really understand. It was just there. And these words, that’s where they came from. And, I mean, there were other words, but of course, I had to be deliberate, because I am creating an, you know, an artificial product, if I could call the novel that. And then I realized, looking at these words, they basically dictated to me what the major themes of the novel are. And I just, you know, I was just, I was scared at first, I was like, “Oh, this is kind of too easy”. And it might seem like laziness. But I realized that, you know, they’re there. There’s so much gift in these local words. And I also wanted to emphasize the notion that local language is very important and that people have a word for their own experience and replacing those words with other words will not work. And how it’s important to listen to people because they have the word for it. And it contains so much knowledge, so much history in you.

Padma And memory.

Daryll And memory. That’s right. Yeah.

Padma Now, you reminded me of another post Haiyan discussion or debate that was raging at the time, which was, if they had described what was going to happen differently, more people

could have been saved. Could more people have gotten to safety, say, if they had said *lunop*, instead of storm surge?

Daryll Exactly. And that's exactly what people said, I mean, in my poem in Panawagan that was the question. You should just have, you know, told us, you should have talked to us, because we know what this is, you know, and we could have done something. And so that's why language is very important. But also it comes with, I guess, respect, and knowing really what your intentions are. Because if the intention really was to communicate, to help, you know, to not just to help people, but to help people help themselves empower them, there was no excuse not to speak to people in their language. But I mean, of course, you know, language is such a huge issue in this country. I mean, we could go on, and on, talking about how language impedes understanding, but also how, you know, it should help it but it's true. That's exactly what they said, if you had used these words, and these other like descriptions, we would have understood exactly what you were trying to tell us.

Padma And did anyone hear that? Did anyone listen? And are those, is that the language now that's used to describe climate change? Or strong storms?

Daryll I wouldn't know. I don't think so. I mean, it's still not been mainstreamed. I think I've been hearing the words more and more since then. But if you look at official language, or government communication, it doesn't use those terms at all. I mean, we had a mayor, for several terms, who did not even speak our local language. I mean, he's back. So yeah. So I mean, I go back to my notion of, you know, to the notion of communication. And, you know, who is it for and what, what is the real intent? And if you really want to get people to take action, or to understand or to respond and speak to them in their language?

Padma Yes. You were born and raised in Tacloban. What was it like for you to return home immediately after Haiyan, I think you were there, how many days after?

Daryll We traveled on the third week, because I was in Kuala Lumpur when it happened, so for three days I had no news about my family. And then I came home, I think we reached, my husband and I reached Tacloban on the fifth day. So it was how... to talk about it. It's hard to talk about it sometimes. I do remember just not processing anything at all, because it was an emergency. And the priority was to get people, as many people out as possible and to deliver, you know, food, medicines, we gave ourselves just a very small window because it was so chaotic. So there was no time to process and maybe my mind also refused to process anything. It was like an out of body experience, to be honest, like I could see myself like, doing what I was supposed to do. I was very methodical like I remember I had a notebook, I had a list of things that I need to do, people I need to look for. And I had a checklist. So yeah, but of course, several days later, maybe weeks, you know, it dawned on me that we might not have a home to go back to or a city to go back to. I mean, our home survived. It was damaged heavily. But you know, it was still upgrade. But just the possibility, the reality that this might be it, we might actually not be able to go back home to Tacloban. But that was you know, a very heavy realization, but also realizing that yes, it was an equalizer, the storm, but it also, I think, highlighted inequality. Yeah. And you could see, and it was painful for me to see how people who had resources could recover so fast,

Padma They could get out,

Daryll They could get out of there, they have the option to stay here in Manila, go elsewhere. But people who didn't have those resources, they were at the mercy of NGOs and government or whoever could reach them. So

Padma Well, the good thing is you do have a home to return to still, and just this September you brought *Remains* home and had a launch. What was that like?

Daryll It was surreal, to be honest. And I was very scared to do it. But I felt like I can't not do it. Like I owe it to Tacloban and to the community that I draw my stories from to give something back to them. And it was very interesting. We did the book forum in UP Tacloban.

But the audience came mainly from different schools, and they were senior high school students. And I had someone read an excerpt of the book in Waray, in one of the Waray passages, and it was just so overwhelming to see them respond and to know that this is our story. We recognize this, but the kids are so intelligent, they were so smart. One of them asked me, so yes, good, fine. We recognize this resonates with us. But what about people years from now, who didn't go through Yolanda, you think they will respond? And he said and what about people in other countries? Other places? And, there were some questions about how do we make sure that people will still remember that this happened? You know, with fake news? It's easy to revise history and say, that didn't really happen. No, you didn't really. You didn't really suffer it.

Padma I was gonna say I can't imagine believing that that never happened. But then we're believing worse things now.

Daryll Right. Exactly. And the kids, they were so sharp. They said it's possible that people will forget it. Forget us, forget our story. So how do you, how do you deal with that? It was a very difficult question. I think I said, when I write, I know that I need to write with conviction. And I know that fiction can carry truths that nonfiction or journalism, or the work that I do in research cannot accommodate. So I just have to trust the readers' ability to understand and I told them look, when I was growing up, I read books about the Russian war, or tragedies that happened in other countries several generations ago. And they stuck with me. So I guess that's how fiction works. And we just, you know, let's see if

Padma If it does still have that power, those stories in the future?

Daryll Exactly, yes.

Padma What worries you personally about climate change?

Daryll A lot. I'm very worried about my, my own self, like maybe I'm not doing enough. I don't understand enough. And I worry very much that people don't really understand it yet again, because of the language thing. Also, because of access to communication, access to information, that we're not doing much. And we're not doing things fast enough. I really worry about that.

Padma What gives you hope?

Daryll Ah, very little, sorry. No, I mean, a few things. For example, the plastic bag. It's become mainstream now, right? Like, you go to supermarkets and you hear people saying what plastic. Never mind this straw. So it's become really mainstream. I think that's a good thing. And I love it. Because in our work, we deal with a lot of like, huge multinational companies, big, big consumer brands. And I am seeing a shift in the inclusion of sustainability, for instance as part of business, like you can't do business without having a sustainability program. That's become more and more common. It used to be that sustainability was this little thing that they put somewhere, right. Like it was just greenwash. And they didn't see it as part of their business objective.

Padma And while you feel that,

Daryll I think it's happening slowly, I don't know to what extent or scale, nothing's happening, but I'm seeing some things shifted. Yes.

Padma But like you said, we just need more and we need it faster. Is there anything you do for yourself to keep calm?

Daryll It calms me when I join collective action, when I'm part of a, of a bigger group. And I really think that's the more important thing today. I mean, we keep asking ourselves, what can I do as an individual as a person, I think what the individual can do is become part of

a collective, and there is no alternative to organizing to collective action. And I panic when I feel like I'm not part of a collective action. And I, you know, when I'm on my own, and, and I also worry that I'm not giving that enough time, you know, like really going out there and being part of a collective action. So what I do to calm me is to participate, to take part.

Padma In your work with Verite and work practices and workers' rights, you also advocate for an organized workforce, right? Yeah. And so I think that matches what you said, it's actually beneficial to belong to an organization and that businesses can benefit from having organized workers when the impulse is usually to crush any kind of organizing in the labor sector. You mentioned already that many companies are now seriously addressing the question of sustainability. Is that sector now also looking at climate change?

Daryll Yes, yes. Yes, it is. And not fast enough or not, not as much as you want them to be, you know, doing but, they are. And of course, they face the challenge of jurisdictions, you know, you have businesses that want to do the right thing, but they all operate in countries that make it hard for them to do the right thing. Because the laws are not in place, because laws are anti-human rights. So, so they have to look for other platforms to do the right thing. But so I mean, it's not going to be easy. We all know that, in fact, I think it's become even more difficult now, because of the rise of, you know, populist, and like, anti science. Yeah, very hostile to science, government. So that impacts on business also. So on the one hand, businesses have to deal with pressure from stakeholders, you know environmental, social and governance requirements. But on the other hand, they have to work with governments in countries where they operate. So that's a real challenge.

Padma And given how hard it is, is there a role for fictionists in the fight to change the course of things? You mentioned this earlier, about feeling unsure about whether poetry or fiction is the right response. How do you feel about that?

Daryll I'm sometimes I delude myself or I comfort myself with a notion that stories carry truths. And I mean, the form, and the devices that we use in storytelling, they help people

make sense of otherwise, you know, senseless experience, and what seems very random or unconnected, so fiction narratives and narrativity, I think has that power to, it's very hard for me, because my mind changes, you know, sometimes I think, no, it's useless. But other times, I think, no, it's, it's really important. And so you know, yourself, I am contradicting myself and also because I studied Comparative Literature, like I criticize my own writing, but it is, I mean, this is not an original idea, narratives have a power to help people make sense and create meanings out of experiences. And I think that's very important that people see that they are part of meaning making, and that, that they have a role to play. And I think fictionists have a role, to write stories about other people and to write stories that invite questioning stories that invite readers to participate rather than, you know, very heavy handed or like very closed formalist types of storytelling. So this is an idea that I've been thinking about the notion of genre and form in fiction and what is needed for, you know, times like these, and sometimes I feel like, you know, a formalist, realist, straightforward, linear storytelling is not enough. We need to disrupt it, we need to, you know, take it apart.

Padma And my last question is, what's your superpower?

Daryll Oh, what's my superpower. I don't think I have one.

Padma If you could have one. What would it be?

Daryll If I could clone myself. Because what I want to do is so varied. I think we all do. And even in my work, like, I love the work that I do. I, you know, I love journalism and research. But I also love literature and storytelling, and I want to write songs and I want to write movies. So you know. Yes, and sometimes I just want to not do anything, just listen and watch. So that's the, that's the superpower that I want to have. I think what I do have is a power to blend. And I think that has worked really well for me. Blending, adjusting. Yeah, blending in and not standing out. I think that that's something that I want to develop more.

Padma

Great. Thank you for sharing your stories and your thoughts with us. Daryll, the original Daryll, not the clone. Thank you so much.

Daryll Thank you. Padma. Thank you.