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Carceral and Colonial Memory During Pandemic Times in the Philippines

A long letter of solidarity from the diaspora

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ABSTRACT | #CommunityPantryPH is a mutual aid movement that began in the Philippines in April 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. The movement is founded on the slogan 'give what you can afford, take what you need.' Instead of the movement receiving an overwhelming welcome, especially within conditions of food scarcity and health insecurity during the long-lasting pandemic, the Duterte government attacked volunteers with 'red-tagging' tactics – the malicious calling out of individuals as communists, which may result in harm both online and in real life to those red-tagged. The public response also circulated myths about the supposed indolence of Filipinos receiving aid and how the volunteers are fanning a culture of dependence among the poor. In this article, I introduce the concepts of 'carceral memory' and 'colonial memory' in understanding colonially inherited punitive, civilising, and self-deprecatory logics that have become embedded in postcolonial disciplinary regimes, and which suppress dissent and shape popular attitude and consciousness in the Global South.

Keywords: Community Pantry; Mutual Aid; COVID-19; Filipino Diaspora; Philippines; Anthropology of the Hometown.

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Introduction

On April 14, 2021, interior designer Ana Patricia Non set up a small cart with free food for the taking at a street corner in Metro Manila, with a sign that translates to 'give what you can afford, take what you need.' Non took a photo of the cart, posted it on social media, and left, and was surprised to find her post go viral overnight with over 15,000 shares. Inspired by Non's simple act of generosity, donations poured in, in the form of cash, food, and essentials. As a result, about 900 community pantries have popped up all over the Philippines as of November 2021.[1] The Community Pantries PH Facebook group has over 22,000 followers; #CommunityPantriesPH is trending on social media as initiatives sprout archipelago-wide. Non's community pantry, and all others that followed suit, emerged more than a year after the public had critiqued the Philippine government's Social Amelioration Program's (SAP) failure to equitably distribute financial aid to the marginalised sectors due to age-old issues haunting Philippine political life such as corruption and lack of institutional capacity (Cuaton and Su 2020, Gozum et al. 2021). However, not everyone was on board. Filipino skeptics on social media critiqued community pantries as potentially encouraging 'indolence' among the poor. The Duterte government and its supporters quickly accused community pantries of being a front for the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), forcing pantries to shut down over worries of volunteers' safety. The 1957 law that outlawed communism in the Philippines was repealed in 1992. While technically no longer illegal, communism as an ideology is criminalised in the Philippines, for example, through Duterte's Republic Act 9372, Section 17, which provides the lower court with the power to make a judgment if an organisation engages in terrorism (Contreras 2018). Under Duterte, the Philippines has become the most dangerous country for activists globally (Watts 2019), and people tagged as dissidents can suffer grave repercussions, ranging from threats on their lives, to extrajudicial killings.

As a diasporic Filipino anthropologist of hometown and the diaspora investigating the circulation of care and solidarity among Filipinos, I discuss in this article the spread of Community Pantries in the Philippines, a transnational mutual aid movement emerging amid the COVID-19 pandemic to ask: what can we learn about the ways in which humans respond to emergencies such as a pandemic? What is at stake for postcolonial people, and for social movements, in learning about Filipinos' responses to the pandemic that includes re-enacting what I call 'carceral memory' and 'colonial memory'? To answer these questions, I begin by illustrating the context of suffering during the pandemic in the Philippines, discuss government responses to the community pantries movement (CPM), and finally, report on our experience of organising a pantry in my hometown in the Bicol region that we operated briefly in April and May 2021. In addressing these themes, I draw from my long-term ethnographic work in my hometown and my experience as a community organiser in the diaspora.

Earlier research held in the virtual world was once peripheral in anthropology (Nardi 2009; Boellstorff 2015), but many researchers turned to digital ethnography due to the circumstance of limited mobility during COVID-19. Ethnography on migrants has arguably always been located in the digital world, or at least partly, as seen for example in the scholarship on Filipino migration which points to the deep imprint of online communication on Filipinos whose lives occur in the transnational realm (Uy-Tioco 2007; Madianou and

Miller 2013; Soriano, Lim, and Rivera-Sanchez 2015; Cabalquinto 2018). The method used in this article qualifies as digital ethnography as the very act of organising a community pantry while away from home involved digital communication. However, transnational separation is a fact of life among diasporic Filipinos bridging distances through different digital communication channels. Beyond using online tools as a way of nurturing connections with my relations, I engage in political activism, mutual aid, and advancement of cultural heritage as the founder of Nabua Forum, my hometown's first online community established in 2006, which has about 3,000 members today. On many occasions, the boundaries between research, personal life, and advocacy, blend into each other.

In March 2021, anthropologist Girish Daswani invited me to deliver a lecture for the online platform *Human Stories* (www.humanstories.ca). I had planned to report on the results of our recently concluded research among Overseas Filipino Workers affected by the pandemic, but the adverse reactions on social media circulating about community pantries compelled me to change my presentation topic and address them in my lecture, and extend them in this article.[2] Many grieve losses while away. I write this article while in the diaspora, and I recognise the privilege of living in the Global North while my home country is overwhelmed with corruption and state violence amidst suffering during the pandemic. There is an enduring debate among Filipino scholars about the privilege and loyalty of those who have left the Philippines. I hope readers receive this piece as an offering to help bridge conversations between Filipinos in the Philippines and the diaspora, perhaps working towards change together, despite distances. The Philippines is in my thoughts daily during the long-lasting pandemic, and I offer this writing as a letter of solidarity to fellow Filipinos. Here, I hope to offer reflections based on my investments in my hometown as an overseas resident inspired, reflecting on, disrupted and beckoned by, the hometown and my relations back home.

The rich literature on social movements has focused on theorising identity in relation to building community (Amit 2002, Anderson 2006, Tilly 2004), human agency and discursive processes framing development projects (Benford and Snow 2000), micro-processes of knowledge-making that make up organisational politics (Conway 2006, Escobar 1995), increasing transnational dimension of solidarity-building (Della Porta, Kriesi, and Rucht 1999, Edelman 2001, Piper and Uhlin 2004), and gendered logics in the discourses that frame organising principles (Ferree and Merrill 2000, Hasso 2001). Scholars have discussed mutual aid as offering the best models for building communities around sharing resources (Katz 1981, Steinberg 2010). Scholars have also pointed out the potential of mutual aid and coalition-building for surviving the pandemic together amid increasing neoliberal and capitalist pressures that atomise communities (Fitsch et al. 2020, Spade 2020). I build on this vast literature on social movements and pay particular attention to the recent emergence of community pantries in the Philippines during COVID-19, amidst crackdowns and anti-poor government responses to efforts at resource redistribution. Critical views by Achille Mbembe (2001), Frantz Fanon (2004), and Albert Memmi (1974) on the enactment of colonial legacies and logics in the postcolony frame my discussion of the responses to the spread of community pantries in the Philippines. Anthropologists have shown that policies on sanitation justified by racist science inherited from

the American colonial period inform public health regulations related to mortuary practices and grieving during COVID-19 in the Philippines, rather than contemporary scientific evidence (Go and Docot 2021). Along with anthropologists Adriana Garriga-López (2020) and Yesmar Oyarzun (2020) who have taken a long durée analysis of the repercussions of the American empire in the compoundedness of disasters in Puerto Rico and the haunting of plantation politics in the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Black community in the U.S., respectively, I also take a genealogical approach to analysis to signal the resilience of the effects of empire on the production and circulation of enduring suffering.

I argue that as coming together in solidarity exemplifies generational memory built into the consciousness of Filipinos who have survived 400 years of colonisation and turbulent post/colonial regimes, as does the government crackdown on the CPM *and* public perceptions about Filipino 'indolence.' As seen in the CPM, the Duterte regime's efforts to chip at solidarity work re-enacts the Philippine colonial governments' *carceral memory* with a track record of criminalising efforts to build communities and gather shared resources. By carceral memory, I refer to the punitive and civilising logics that were inherited from the colonial period that have become embedded in postcolonial disciplinary regimes that are meant to suppress dissent while shaping popular attitude and consciousness. Additionally, the public's criticism about the supposed indolence of the marginalised recipients of community pantries is a postcolonial tragedy that echoes *colonial memory*, and that now shows increasingly atomised postcolonial Filipinos echoing the myth of indolence historically ascribed by colonisers who saw their labour as valuable for as long as it fuelled imperial and capitalist desires. By colonial memory, I refer to the coloniser-imposed tropes based on racialised and gendered hierarchies that were hammered into postcolonial consciousness through what Renato Constantino (1970) calls 'mis-education.' I deepen my analysis of these two kinds of memory further below, and discuss the relevance of understanding them especially in relation to sustaining social movements that experience crackdowns and threats in a political context ruled by a heavy-handed autocratic regime. In the following section, I provide a brief review of the gravity of the effect of the pandemic in my home country.

Impact of COVID-19 in the Philippines

In June 2021, the Philippines was experiencing the second-worst COVID-19 surge in Southeast Asia, after Indonesia, logging a daily average of about 5,000 positive cases (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2021). By the end of August, the Philippines had already surpassed Indonesia, reporting 30,000 cases daily (Balaoing 2021). Sanitation and quarantine regulations implemented in the Philippines since the pandemic's start remain inconsistent, if not absurd. The unemployment rate in the Philippines during COVID-19 is high at 8.8% or 4.5 million (Rivas 2021). Insecurities arising during the pandemic are compounded by the government's militarised response, blending with extrajudicial killings under Duterte's war on drugs. The climate of fear grows as the police commit senseless killings (Gozum 2020). The Philippines slipped in the Global Happiness rankings, reflecting the affective toll of the drug war and the pandemic on Filipinos' well-being (Bueza 2021).

In an economy relying on migrant dollar incomes from overseas, migrant incomes ameliorate economic downturns caused by unexpected emergencies such as political, natural, and health disasters. However, families relying on cash remittances from relatives working abroad are in trouble as over a million overseas Filipino workers have been repatriated to the Philippines upon losing their jobs as of September 2021 (Sarao 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the vulnerability of the political and economic structure of the Philippines that largely depends on migrant remittances, foreign investments, and foreign aid. The bulk of overseas Filipino workers engaged in so-called elementary occupations earn USD350 to 400 a month. Some migrants might be burdened with pre-departure loans to pay back, and have little left for cushions for emergencies, including the current unanticipated large-scale public health emergency. In our recently concluded interviews with over 50 overseas Filipinos affected and displaced by COVID-19, repatriated workers testified about their turbulent experience as locally stranded individuals left with little or no support from the government.

Apart from the government's mismanagement of public health programs, Filipinos also experience insecurity due to a lack of access to life-saving healthcare benefits. The dearth of public services in the Philippines links with the government's commitments to advance foreign interests at the expense of precaritising Filipino lives and labour. Programs that build infrastructure in the countryside remain weak while labour outsourcing companies such as call centres mushroom in urban areas. Livelihood programs in the countryside remain on the fringes of national priorities, leading to the sustained movement of people from the countryside to the cities, which means that the surplus of workers in Manila also grows. A growth in surplus workers leads to workers' fungibility. Business owners increase their profit by keeping labour costs low and by keeping workers in a state of limbo by not awarding them regular employment contracts. The so-called 5-5-5 system of contractual employment in which labour contracts are renewable every five months – a month away from being regularised as stipulated in the law – perfectly illustrates how workers in the Global South are kept locked-in in a state of precarity (Docot 2020). Filipino workers on 5-5-5 contracts do not get salary increases, and during a health crisis, will not have access to healthcare benefits available to regularised workers.

The context of suffering above notwithstanding, there remains no nationally implemented COVID-19 relief for Filipinos in need. Government loans for COVID-19 response have already ballooned to USD15.49B (ABS-CBN Investigative and Research Group 2021), but the vaccination rollout has been slow. Government support for businesses and citizens has been the 'least generous' in Southeast Asia (Castaneda 2021). Groups are lobbying in the Philippine Congress to approve a PhP10,000 cash subsidy (approximately USD200) for families in need, but the Duterte government has indicated that delivering cash aid is currently not a priority. Non said about establishing CPM, 'When people are hungry, it is difficult to work, to study, and to think… Not everyone has aid or receives sufficient aid. That community pantries became viral means that there is a great need for them. It also means that Filipinos are hungry and that action is needed to address it' (Rappler 2021, my translation). Non's initiative inspired many. A mass-based community pantries movement emerged in the Philippines within financial, political, and health insecurity and safety crises. Below, I discuss the CPM in the Philippines as an avenue for learning about

the different ways that humans act during a time of crisis. I will focus on the two most common responses to the CPM emanating from the government and the broader public, followed by an analysis of how these could be understood using postcolonial theory centred on memory.

Responses to Community Pantries

1) Government 'Red-Tagging' of CPM Volunteers

Community pantries generally offer essentials such as food, soaps, and disinfectants, but some focus on providing breakfast staples such as coffee and *taho* (sweet soya), health checkups, books, and toys. One would think that there would be an overwhelming sense of acceptance of efforts in building and sustaining community pantries, especially within conditions of food scarcity and health insecurity during the pandemic, but it was not the case. In the Philippines, 'red-tagging' is the malicious calling out and profiling of individuals as communists. Those 'red-tagged' may be subjected to threats or actual harm both online and in real life.

To address brewing debates about the 'red' (meaning socialist/communist-influenced) ideology purportedly underpinning the CPM, and reports on the red-tagging of volunteers which pushed some pantries to shut down out of fear of attacks, the Philippine Congress held a three-hour public hearing focused on community pantries on May 19 with presentations by government representatives and leaders of public interest groups. The National Task Force to End Local Communist Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC), a controversial task force created in 2018 through a decree signed by Duterte that has become known for tagging activists and organisers as supposed members and sympathisers of the Communist Party of the Philippines-New Peoples Army (CPP-NPA), was concerned with Non's raised fist in a photograph – a gesture that the government attaches to communist insurgency and the revolutionary struggle in the Philippines. At the hearing, NTF-ELCAC representative Lt. Gen. Antonio Parlade spoke about the 'dubious' strategies of community pantries which he likened to anti-government activities. Parlade said that pantry volunteers circulate signature campaigns to oust the president, and distribute leaflets critical of the Duterte administration. Parlade also argued that CPM's slogan – to give according to what one can afford and take based on necessity – is reminiscent of Karl Marx's (1970) ideas published in his 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program* in Germany. In his famous review of the Gotha socialist party's platform, Marx defined the 'higher phase of communist society' as one in which people are guided by the principle: 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.' Additionally, Parlade is concerned that the funds raised by the pantries go to causes beyond redistributing aid to the poor. He concluded his speech at the hearing with, 'We are just informing our citizens that there are organisations using these activities in order to generate funding from abroad, from everywhere, and some of this funding goes to the armed struggle' (Rappler 2020).

2) Public Perceptions About Filipino Indolence

Another set of responses to the community pantries is related to public perceptions about how aid distribution breeds Filipino indolence. A viral thread posted on the Community Pantry PH Facebook group included screenshots of a mother-

daughter online chat about their opposing perspectives about the CPM.[3] The daughter, a pantry volunteer, had publicly shared her frustrations about her mother's reactionary sentiments about the CPM. Her mother told her that *'pagtitiis, sakripisyo at disiplina'* (perseverance, sacrifice, and discipline) are better solutions than aid distribution. The bible says that fishers must learn to fish and not simply receive fish, the mother wrote to her daughter. The mother also said that the CPP-NPA, via progressive government leaders, influences today's youth. The mother wrote that the 'truth,' is that those in need, such as the sick, do not want solutions because rations for them will end. The mother told her daughter that community pantries cultivate dependence among the poor who use the pandemic to avoid work. The daughter reminded her mother in the chat that their family also once benefitted from non-governmental organisation assistance, and thus, her mother's generalisations about the poor sound unfair. Addressing her mother's anti-poor sentiments, the daughter explained, 'laziness is not the root of poverty… The problem is systemic… Do farmers get rich? They work so hard, but it is only their landlords who gain wealth.'

Responses from the public similar to the mother's described above circulate on social media. Overall, critics of community pantries echo statements such as the following: 1) The poor should be taught how to survive and work like everyone else; 2) The poor expect freebies and do not want to work, and; 3) The poor should learn how to sow seeds so they will have food to harvest later. Following this section that discussed broader responses to the CPM, I zoom in below on the transnational community pantry we organised in my home village. The community pantry that we operated, while nowhere near the scale of the ones in Manila, shows how mutual aid projects unfold during a pandemic, within an intimate space of the home village, and amidst rising anxieties caused by autocratic projects that amplify fear and suppress community-building.

San Nicolas Community Pantry

My friend Ellaine Villarasa, a grade school teacher, sent me a message on Facebook on April 17 that we could also try to set up the pantry in our home *barangay* (neighbourhood). San Nicolas is nestled in the central area of Nabua, a predominantly agricultural municipality in the riverine district of Camarines Sur (Bicol region, Luzon Island), but with some areas considered semi-urban such as our barangay. San Nicolas is within walking distance to the town hall, public market, clinic, church, university, and other institutions that are otherwise difficult to access from the rice-producing farm areas. I received Ellaine's message while in California; I had moved from the campus town in Indiana in which I lived alone for work, to Southern California where my immigrant family lives, in June 2020, amidst the spreading pandemic. Ellaine also invited San Nicolas elected official Malou Manlangit to help set up the pantry. I am unsure if setting up our pantry could be called a collaboration and if it is one shaped by our various agendas and positionalities (Kennemore and Postero 2020), but it was clear to me that we came together as neighbours wanting to address an urgent need affecting our community. All three of us combed our respective local and transnational networks to invite others to join our cause (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Call for donations

We collected a total of USD1,544 for the community pantry – funds that allowed us to open for 15 days (Figure 2). The bulk of donations received (81.15%) were from diasporic Filipinos; 11.53% were from Filipinos residing in the Philippines. Finally, non-Filipinos contributed 7.32% of the total amount. The importance of Filipino diasporic giving manifests in this small example, but it is also important to note the in-kind donations delivered to the community pantries locally. A food stand selling fried plantains and noodles provided snacks to the pantry volunteers. A vegetable vendor who lined up at the pantry for rice and condiments returned the following day to leave freshly harvested crops from her garden for the pantry. The gift of labour given by local volunteers to set up the pantry was also unparalleled. We had set the pantry to open at nine before the sun rises too high, but we adjusted to an earlier schedule upon learning that people arrive as early as six to ensure that they can receive food essentials for the day (Figure 3). For the volunteers, this meant waking up sometimes as early as four in the morning to purchase and pack the items for the pantry.

Figure 2. The setup of our transnationally operated community pantry

Figure 3. Queue at the pantry

On Facebook messenger, in between time zones, our team strategised how to manage the pantry. We followed guidelines and organising principles in setting up a community pantry released by CPM volunteers (Figures 4 and 5). Community Pantry PH explicitly defines pantries as 'mutual aid: solidarity, not charity'; pantries are organised for people to 'help each other out, not treat others like they are charity cases.' Ultimately, volunteers take part in the movement 'to remind each other that we can rely on one another…' Our team also read updates on red-tagging and planned strategies around them. In Nabua, aid recipients commonly acknowledge donors, especially politicians or prospective political candidates fortifying their names. Donors rally support around them through the resources they redistribute. The town also annually publishes a 'souvenir program' containing the names and photographs of donors to the annual festival. Public monuments and utilities generally bear the names of donors, whether they are individuals, groups, or clubs. By attaching names to material contributions, people publicly perform 'power relationships' with each other in which those with wealth exhibit to the poor that they can be relied upon (Cannell 1999), sometimes bolstering political dynasties.[4] Elders returning to Nabua after years of work overseas donate funds to build public monuments, school buildings, benches, and libraries, to demonstrate wealth and generosity. In a context of intergenerational inequality, the gift economy sustains relationships between those with resources and those needing help. However, in Fenella Cannell's ethnography in a Bicol town close to Nabua, those with fewer resources could also demand aid or withdraw their support for the powerful by refusing gifts. In a situation of instability wrought by events such as a natural disaster, the gifting economy also blends with the theological virtue of charity, rendering the economy of gifting additionally complex (Fountain, Kindon, and Murray 2004). That the CPM is founded on principles of solidarity and that mutual aid organisers can choose not to name donors complicates patron-client relationships in places such as Nabua. Anonymous donations made to community pantries counter patronage politics in the Philippines in which politicians' actions are grounded in promoting their name and accumulating prestige and personal gain to perpetuate their position.

San Nicolas is a relatively small neighbourhood with only about 200 households familiar to each other. In a community where people can trace kinships through consanguinity or ritual-based relations, red-tagging and police brutality seem to be a lesser concern even if newspapers reported in 2015 that Nabua has emerged as the 'drug capital of Camarines Sur' (Bicol Standard 2015, Politiko 2015). There appears to be a striking difference in how Duterte's drug war is unfolding in rural towns such as Nabua. A police officer in Nabua shared with me that the Nabua police has recorded only four casualties in their drug-related operations since Duterte launched his drug campaign in July 2017, until May 2018. Nabua has not seen the level of drug-related violence as in Metro Manila, which has recorded, for example, a death toll of 60 in three days in August 2017 (Mogato 2017). Fears and discourses of red-tagging tactics and extrajudicial killings seem peripheral to the local imaginary and are more prevalent in urban contexts such as Manila.

Figure 4. How to set up community pantries in the Philippines released by @abolisyon on Facebook

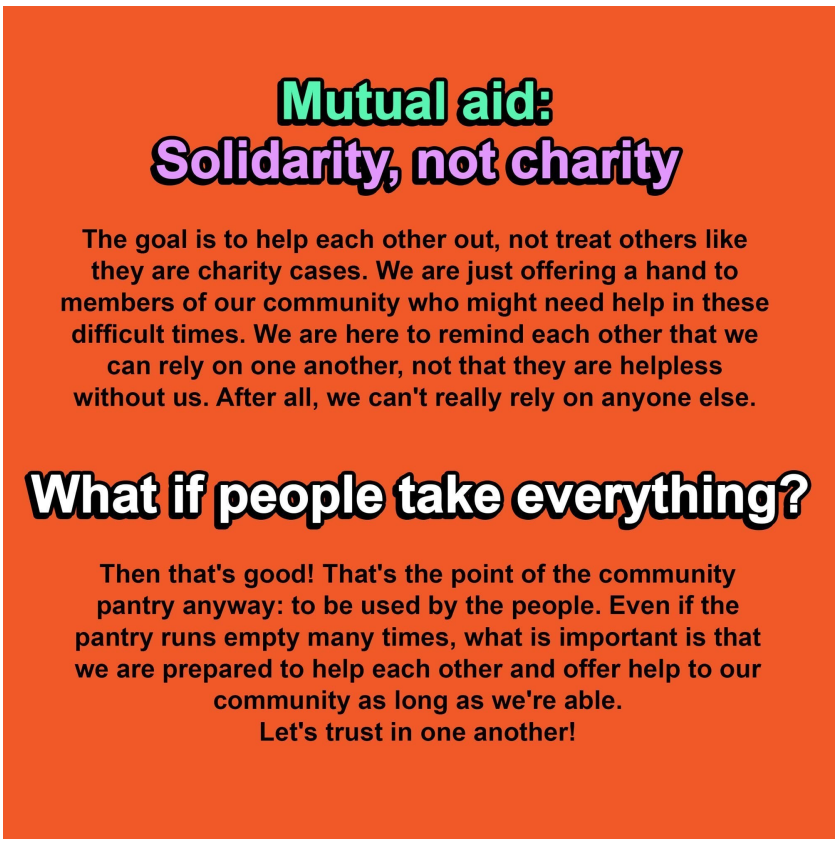

Figure 5. CPM principles on mutual aid released by @abolisyon on Facebook

On April 19, Non's community pantry shut down temporarily following social media posts by the Quezon City Police District, NTF-ELCAC, and private citizens that tagged community pantries as organised communist propaganda (De Leon 2021). Our team chatted online about getting red-tagged but comforted ourselves that our neighbours, aware of our genealogies, will most likely not subject us to harm. We also recognised that some donors might expect to be named for their own political purposes, mainly because elections are coming in 2022. Where communications infrastructure lacks, people use ready-to-use platforms such as Facebook to disseminate information, including announcements of donations benefiting the community. However, we also raised among ourselves the potentially massive reach of our social media posts about our pantry given that the Philippines is among the world's biggest users of social media in the world (Internet World Stats 2017). Duterte supporters abound online, it is not impossible to picture that people beyond San Nicolas might red-tag our publicly named donors. Therefore, we broke from the practice of publicly announcing donations on social media and kept all donations anonymous. By setting the practice of naming donors against the situation of profiling affecting community pantries more broadly, we created a space in which unnamed solidarities and donations trump political desires to be recognised publicly.

Amidst news of pantries shutting down, the Nabua police published their support for our initiative on social media with a rather curious message, 'Do not close down because you are needed by the people. We even encourage you to come up with other ways to help the community' (Figure 6). CPM emerged as a response to government inaction. Located in the margins of national and regional politics and spotlight, tracing the delivery of public aid is even more challenging in small towns like Nabua. The local police wanted to assure pantry volunteers' safety but curiously demanded other forms of aid from the public already taking the pandemic's brunt without comfortable cushions from the state and the local

Figure 6. Statement of support from Nabua Mps Csppo on Facebook

government. In San Nicolas, nine families with members who tested COVID-19 positive and were required to quarantine for 14 days received a one-time cash aid of PhP1,000 (USD19.66). Since the outset of the pandemic in 2020 until August 2021, barangay officials have distributed ten rounds of food aid to San Nicolas residents using combined monies from the municipal, congressional, and regional budget. Food packages distributed per family during each round of donations typically include 20 kilos of rice, sardines, noodles, and a tray of eggs. Officials on the village level do not have ready access to these funds and submit a request at the higher offices. Meanwhile, leaders in farming villages are disadvantaged by road and transportation access, and thus have less capacity in lobbying for resources for their constituents.

The Nabua police posted their support of our pantry in response to national news about pantries closing due to threats on volunteers' lives following red-tagging. Arguably, Nabua police might indeed support the spread of mutual aid in the town as they say in their social media post. However, their social media post about our pantry also arguably reflects their ambivalence in locally implementing Duterte's priorities to curb drug use. Duterte has instructed the police to 'shoot them all,' 'kill them all,' 'finish them,' and other iterations. In Nabua, where people can possibly locate consanguineal or ritual kinships (with the police included), there appears to be discomfort among the police in deploying punitive and shaming tactics targeting alleged local drug lords and users. Nabua police's images of the drug war on their Facebook page differ from the macabre images circulated by police units in urban places. For example, the Nabua police conceal suspected drug personalities' faces with emoticons, countering Duterte's approval to shame suspects publicly (Figure 7).[5]

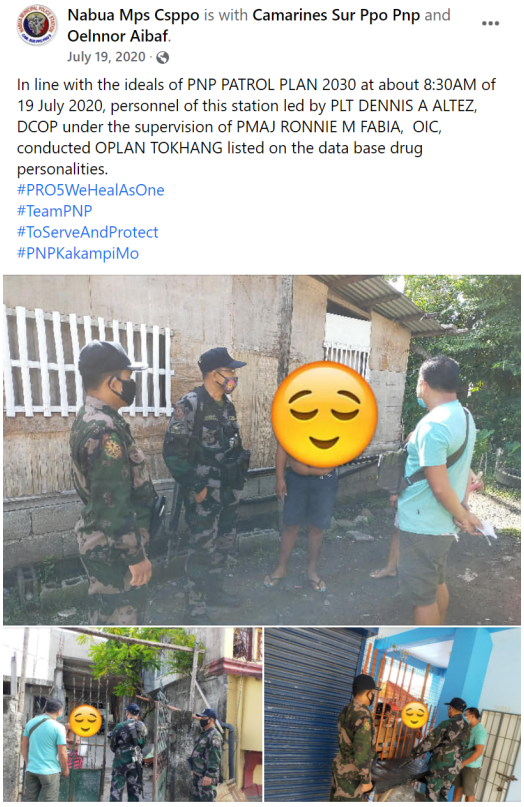

Figure 7. A report on local drug war operations posted by the Nabua police on their Facebook page

So far, I have written in this section the strategies we developed for the San Nicolas Community Pantry which are responsive to instances of red-tagging haunting the CPM. In discussing the second set of responses about the myth of Filipino indolence, it is critical to contextualise local imaginings about modernity and success as hinged on townspeople's historical overseas mobilities. While predominantly agricultural, residents nicknamed Nabua the 'Town of Dollars,' owed to the male townsfolk who were recruited to the lowest ranks of the United States Navy from the beginning of the 20th century, until the closure of the last U.S. Bases in the Philippines in 1991. As a result, overseas mobilities and migrants' stories of adventure, hard work, and endurance while reaching for the so-called 'American Dream,' profoundly shaped residents' desires and ambitions for success. I mentioned earlier that the bulk of the donations from the San Nicolas pantry were from the Filipino diaspora. In my broader research, Filipino migrants often talk about their struggles overseas related to experiencing racism, underemployment, and transnational separation, and contrast them with the labour and efforts of those left behind. As a labour brokerage state (Rodriguez 2010), the Philippine government peddles an image of overseas Filipino workers as hardworking heroes sacrificing their time away for their family and their futures and the country needing migrant remittances as a cushion from recurring economic disasters.

Thus, it was not surprising that some responses to our call echoed perceptions about the myth of Filipino indolence discussed in the previous section. In my inbox, overseas residents of Nabua commented on the supposed dependence of our townmates on overseas remittances and gifts.[6] On April 23, 2021, I posted a thread on Twitter about the condescension of overseas Filipinos to those receiving aid which went viral with over 353,500 impressions, over a thousand retweets, and 134 quote tweets.[7] A 'quote tweet' is a repost of a tweet with a Twitter user's additional comment, for their own purposes. The quote tweets of my thread are rife with testimonies about Filipinos' encounters with attitudes of condescension by overseas Filipinos directed to those 'left-behind' in the Philippines. Quote-tweets of my thread included the following (translated or edited for clarity): 'sounds familiar,' 'this sounds like my DDS (Diehard Duterte Supporter) brother,' 'these are your aunties who became wealthy overseas and have nothing else coming out of their mouths but say we must work harder…,' 'I have so many relatives who think like this.' One wrote, 'Do they need a reminder as to why they left the country in the first place? Governments elsewhere take care of them, and that's why they no longer want to come home…' Perspectives about the idleness and unproductivity of people left behind in the hometown articulated by those in the diaspora are unfortunately premised on racialised perceptions about Filipinos, which, as I will argue further below, links with systemic land dispossession haunting the Philippines, such as in rural towns like Nabua.

Reg-tagging as Carceral Memory

This section deepens my discussion of the two responses to the CPM, using critical scholarship on postcolonial memory. Scholars have written about how memory is negotiated (Cruikshank 1997, Moore 2007), distorted (Climo and Cattell 2002), and silenced (Bear 2007, Carsten 2007, Nandy 1995). In understanding the two responses to solidarity movements outlined above, I look at how memory as *re-enacted* is fruitful in understanding the antagonisms towards solidarity-building

projects in postcolonial situations. Frantz Fanon (2004) argues that violence inflicted by dictatorial regimes mirrors an empire's administrative ideologies that operated on distrust of the masses; thus, violence inflicted by postcolonials among themselves, within ongoing structures of oppression, reproduces power as it operated in the colonial past. In multiplying their wealth and privileges during the decolonial period, wealthy native elites immediately demanded the nationalisation of holdings of farms once owned by colonists (102). On a related note, Achille Mbembe (2001: 131-33) argues that postcolonial leaders maintain power by miming absurdities in the colonial period such that 'obscenity' operates as a common modality in everyday life. By obscenity, Mbembe does not refer to values diverging from ethics or religion, but one which 'harks back to the headiness of social forms – including the suppression of life' (116). Leaders claim and reproduce power by dramatising it, exploding power into modes of 'vulgarity and wrongdoing' (133).

Following Fanon and Mbembe's thoughts, I argue that contemporary and postcolonial re-enactments of the absurd, obscene, and vulgar, make up what can be called 'carceral memory.' Imperial projects operated on violence that did not make sense to colonised subjects whose lives were interrupted by lingering threats of punishment or death aimed to pacify supposedly unruly people. These modes of incarceration continue in the colonial afterlife. Fanon argues that leaders continue to crush the imagined opposition perceived as 'rebellious and recalcitrant' (72). Fanon continues to argue that cynicism, lack of tolerance of other ideologies, and distrust, undergird postcolonial regimes' declarations for the necessity of a 'dose of dictatorship' that draws from techniques of pacification that are 'reminiscent in some ways of the colonial power' (ibid).

Fanon and Mbembe's attention to how techniques of oppression are recalled and re-enacted in the postcolonial situation illuminate the confounding responses to solidarity-building in the Philippines which the state perceives as a threat to its power. Tagging activists and community workers as dissidents has a long history in the Philippines. The Philippines had inherited from the U.S. colonial period (1898 to 1946) the novel strategies it developed in the islands to track counterinsurgency and dissent (McCoy 2009). Filipino craft and industry workers organised themselves informally as early as the 1870s, developing into a 20,000-member strong nationwide labour union in 1902 under the leadership of newspaperman Isabelo de los Reyes, later jailed with other union leaders for sedition (Sibal 2004).[8] In collusion with Filipino landowning elites, U.S. colonial administrators in the Philippines repressed anti-imperialist ideology by establishing a non-revolutionary framework for Philippine nationalism (Woods 2018). Local leaders inspired by communist ideologies were seen as a threat 'because their critique situated the United States of America as part of the oppressive world-wide system of the white colonial rule over non-white peoples' (Woods 2018, 62). U.S.-sponsored anti-revolutionary politics in the Philippines would have repercussions on postcolonial consciousness. Renato Constantino (1972) argues that Spanish colonial era thinker José Rizal was an American favourite over Andres Bonifacio, leading to his heroification. Constantino reasons that Rizal was a reformist who refused to align with the anticolonial struggle, while Bonifacio was a peasant revolutionary who advocated independence from colonial influence through armed struggle.

The circulation of anti-revolutionary ideology intensified as post-WW2 leadership protected extractive capitalist industries flourishing in the Philippines. Throughout the history of mass-based movements, Filipino (and foreign) students, activists, and community organisers advancing the grievances and rights of marginalised communities have been red-tagged, sometimes leading to extrajudicial killings. There are many examples such as the assassination of: anti-dam activist and Butbut elder Macli-ing Dulag, in 1980 (Delina 2020); Ati youth activist Dexter Condez, who fought for land rights in their ancestral territory, in 2013 (Burgos 2013), and; volunteer worker in post-Typhoon Haiyan Jefferson Custodio, in 2014 (Yee 2018). More recently, on June 15, 2021, three Lumad-Manobo (including a 12-year old girl) were gunned down by members of the Philippine Army while harvesting abaca hemp in their ancestral land (Bolledo 2021). The military wrote in their incident report that the three were rebels of the NPA and had fired first at the members of the Philippine Army.

At this junction, I return to Mbembe's critical arguments about disciplining bodies and their labour in the postcolony. Mbembe argues that labour in the postcolony is no longer simply expropriated, used and abused, for efficiency towards economic productivity. This means that 'forced labour' takes a form different from racialised labour during the colonial period. In the postcolony, Mbembe argues that regimes subject people to participate in 'displays and ceremonies' where 'bodies are neutered' if they threaten order (115). The postcolony subjects people to what Mbembe calls 'an economy of death' (ibid). At the outset of the pandemic, Duterte ordered the police and military to 'shoot them dead!' – referring to the violators of the quarantine, including protesters demanding better public health governance. Police brutality grew to absurd proportions as the pandemic unfolded, including the death of a quarantine violator on April 2021, resulting from fatigue after police forced him to do 300 squats. Red-tagging tactics harass and intimidate activists and organisers, and suppress solidarity-building efforts calling out injustice, human rights violations, and extractive operations in the Philippines that dispossess Indigenous peoples in favor of capital (Human Rights Watch 2015).

The militarised response to the pandemic under Duterte, shored up by red-tagging, attack efforts as essential as activities that address food insecurity. These tactics descend from a carceral genealogy that punishes the marginalised. The Duterte government has not provided sufficient life-saving aid; it intensifies fear through red-tagging tactics amidst a situation that is already volatile. Community and mass-based responses to the pandemic show that humans organise themselves to survive through collectivity and mutual aid during disasters. Amidst the messy lockdowns in the Philippines emerge a people supporting each other and redistributing resources. In contrast, the government has shown a preoccupation with suppressing collective action, even if the action is benign, and clearly needed in these brutally distressing times.

The Myth of Filipino Indolence as Colonial Memory

Commenting on the public's responses to the spread of community pantries in the Philippines, Dalmacito Cordero, Jr. (2021) writes that 'the virtue of solidarity is tainted with the vice of laziness.' Cordero writes that vice refers to the absence of virtue while virtue is the balance between excess and lack of a certain virtuous

quality. Because of the pandemic's immense impact on people's livelihood, Cordero argues that accusations about the vice of laziness do not have a basis, no matter how many times people avail of resources. Beyond Cordero's commentary, there is a need to unpack discourses about the myth of the 'lazy Filipino native' by considering myth as historically produced and re-enacted.

Statements about Filipino indolence echo racist stereotypes crafted by colonisers that harmed Filipinos historically.[9] German explorer Feodor Jagor travelled in the Philippines between 1859 to 1860 during the Spanish colonial period and lamented Filipinos' disinterest in supplying the European market with in-demand products abundant in the islands. Jagor wrote on the people of Bicol whose gardens were flourishing with cacao trees, 'so great is the native laziness that frequently the berries are allowed to decay, although the local cacao sells for a higher price than the imported.'[10] Filipinos also appear in the U.S. colonial archives as needing to be rescued from the deadly sickness of indolence it was perceived to be. A U.S. colonial administrator had expressed that Filipinos wanted at least three days off weekly, are weak, and cannot do heavy lifting (Atkinson 1905). Not wanting to build and participate in labour for the metropole, colonisers deemed Filipinos as wasteful idlers. Colonisers evaluated Filipinos against the racial and capitalist metric whereby their labour was only valuable if they fuelled the circulation of capital and generated profits for the empire.

Rizal (2004) debunks the myth of Filipino indolence, using the fable of the gardener who tried hard but failed to raise a tree in a small pot. The gardener attributed the failure to the plant which he thought was from a weak species. What the gardener did not see, according to Rizal, was that his venture failed because of the lack of soil in which he tried to nurture his tree. Taking this story in understanding the root of the so-called indolence of the Filipino, Rizal argues that education and liberty serve as the 'soil and sun of mankind,' nourishing the minds of people, and without which, true reform cannot occur. I extend this conversation about the myth of indolence linked to historical dispossession by slightly shifting our discussion to the ordinariness of landlessness and increasing wage-based farmwork in Nabua. It is common practice for wage-based farmers to work on a small plot and receive payment in the form of one sack out of every 11 sacks of unmilled rice grains (*palay*). One sack of palay costs USD16.7. Usually, two farming partners split this share, which means that four or five days of a farmer's labour total to less than USD2 per day.

Rizal argues that education is the route towards liberation. However, it is important to consider the paradox of aspirations for liberation through education among people with little capital to fulfil aspirations for upward mobility oriented away from land-based labour, towards professionalisation, or increasingly, overseas migration. In my research on Filipino migration, people identifying as poor try their best to invest in education. However, less privileged people lease or sell land to those with capital to afford the education needed for upward mobility. Without capital to sustain expenses for higher education, descendants of farmers would find themselves completing high school and technical training, obtaining the minimum requirements for work overseas as caregivers, domestic workers, and other low-paying occupations. This means that towns such as Nabua progressively become what Neferti Tadiar (2013) regards as places where cheap sources of labour are warehoused. In collusion with wealthy nations needing

cheap labour, the Philippine government overlooks the need to invest in local infrastructure in the rural areas and return land to the dispossessed. The government passed laws for returning land to the agricultural poor in 1987, but the rich still hold on to their vast agricultural property.

The trope of Filipino indolence reverberating today in everyday discourse, including in conversations about the expediency of mutual aid during a pandemic, demonstrates the resilience of colonial memory through centuries of foreign occupation. Albert Memmi (1974: 126) writes that myths about native indolence, ingratitude, backwardness, and other negatives, constitute the firmly engraved 'portrait of wretchedness' of the colonised. Colonisers deploy the myth of native indolence with 'unanimous approval' in all colonized places as not only does it occupy 'an important place in the dialectics exalting the colonizer and humbling the colonized,' it is also 'economically fruitful' (123). For Memmi, industry justifies the coloniser's wealth and privilege, while indolence justifies the destitution of the colonized (ibid). Colonisers depersonalised mythical negative traits such as indolence and ascribed them to an 'anonymous collectivity' (129). Colonisers deemed the labour of the colonised always insufficient, which they equated with the barest of wages. These myths would find use in U.S. President Harry Truman's post-World War II vision for a supposedly reciprocal relationship between developed countries and the so-called Third World. Truman promoted discourses about growth, capital, and reform, that recruited and committed people in formerly colonised countries to a brand of development in which they are modern, hardworking, and responsible subjects who must put in work to advance themselves, even if the scales of power are unequal to begin with (Escobar 1995). Truman's development rhetoric into work ethic and ideas about the self encoded into people's consciousness via 300 years of religious conversion in the Philippines. In a situation of devaluation of labour and the self, upward mobility is close to impossible. The ascription of negativity among the colonised would have lingering repercussions on imagining the Philippines in the postcolonial situation. Scholars portrayed Philippine culture as damaged (Fallows 1987). Canonical scholarship on Filipino interpersonal relations describes Filipinos as oriented toward 'smoothness' in their relationships (Lynch 1962), suggesting that turbulence undergirds Filipino relations. Theories about personhood focused on shame and guilt (Enriquez 1989, Kaut 1961, Tabbada 2005) appear in popular and political discourse. The state uses concepts from personhood theory in mobilizing Filipinos as responsible, hardworking, and money-making subjects.

The coloniser-colonised relationship constitutes both admiration and fear, and in this relationship, the colonised confront the image of themselves as degraded (Memmi 1974). For Memmi, memory is critical to the circulation of these myths. Removed from their histories, colonised peoples regard the past with shame, internalise racialised myths, and celebrate events that mythologise themselves as degraded people needing salvation. Memmi writes, 'The most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community' (135). Therefore, the supposed indolence of Filipinos in the margins that circulate today re-enacts colonial memory, and folds into an enduring power struggle, now with the bourgeoisie and new elites upholding dehumanising myths that once applied to colonised peoples, including themselves, generally.

Conclusions: What's at Stake?

Mutual aid makes visible the kindness, work, and energy of people during times of need, as conversely, it highlights government inefficiency and tendency to be self-serving. The Community Pantries Movement in the Philippines provides an insight into how countries in the so-called 'Global South' respond to the COVID-19 pandemic amidst an authoritarian regime's mismanagement and fear-mongering. I introduced in this article what I called 'carceral memory' and 'colonial memory,' which are colonially inherited punitive, civilising, and self-damaging logics that have become ingrained in postcolonial disciplinary regimes, suppressing dissent and shaping consciousness among formerly colonised people. Emerging scholarship on the experience of COVID-19 in the Philippines has focused on the traditional practice of *bayanihan* or community spirit (Bankoff 2020, Montefrio 2020). With ten percent of the Philippine population living and working overseas, the expression of *pagkalinga* or care for each other increasingly occurs transnationally. In the Philippines, local and transnational solidarity networks have attempted to gather resources to address the urgent issue of food insecurity, only to be met with red-tagging and accusations that their efforts fuel indolence among the marginalised. I have focused on negative re-enactments of memory; future research might also think about what I have alluded to as 'generational memory,' built into the consciousness of Filipinos who have survived 400 years of colonisation and turbulent postcolonial regimes, manifesting in the different ways that people come together in solidarity.

In reflecting on what is at stake for postcolonial people and social movements advocating for justice amidst re-enactments of carceral and colonial memory, I would like to end with a more positive note about how humans make sense of a turbulent world through solidarity work as seen in the Philippines. However, the hard truth is that the Global South is taking the brunt of the pandemic. In Puerto Rico, the situation is similarly deeply frustrating: the island is still recovering from the devastating effects of previous hurricanes; aid barely comes in because of U.S.-imposed shipping restrictions; the population of the elderly and immunocompromised are significant at 20% and 16%, respectively; poverty is pervasive, and; the coffers cannot support a pandemic-induced economic crashdown (Garriga-López 2020). Political violence that enacts similar carceral and colonial memory persists amidst postcolonial conditions. Mbembe reminds us that claims to power, which arguably include violent red-tagging tactics, are rooted in powerlessness, and thus, 'it is precisely the situations of powerlessness that are the situations of violence par excellence' (133).

There is also something to learn from community pantries about the structure of inequality that humans navigate every day. The purchasing power of dollar donations to community pantries makes the materiality of global inequality visible to donors and organisers. USD70 can buy a spread of vegetables, enough to feed about 30 families for a day (Figure 8). The CPM also highlighted for many organisers and its supporters the impact of land injustice on the food supply chain affecting the poorest of the poor. Capitalist food supply chains force farmers to sell their produce half of its price to traders, who then re-sell them at triple or quadruple the price in the urban markets (Non 2021).

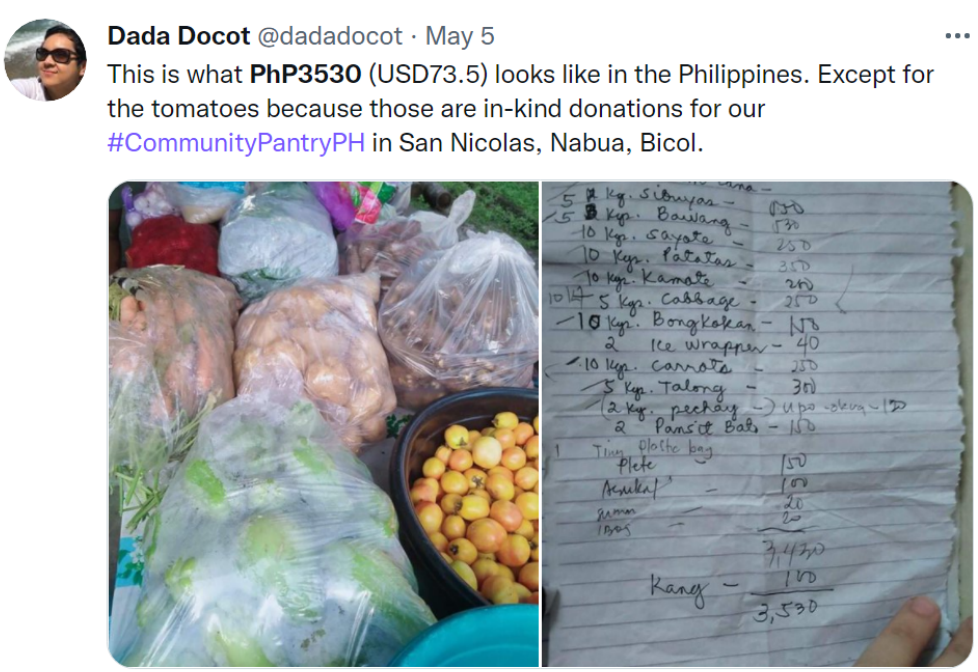

Figure 8. I tweeted updates on the pantry to report to donors the pantry's expenses

The community pantry that we opened in our barangay was nowhere near the scale of the ones in Manila. Non's first online fundraiser for the Maginhawa Community Pantry reached USD20,000 in less than 30 days.[11] However, personal donations to sustain community pantries are limited. Many small-scale pantries like ours depleted their resources and sadly folded. When pantries finally close, people are confronted with the painful fact that their taxes paid while working locally or fees paid to obtain a government permit to work abroad, may not be reaching people in need. CPM critics worry that the movement is unwittingly cultivating a culture of dependence among the poor, instead of hard work and resourcefulness. Both the government and the public chip at solidarity-building efforts even if essentials such as food could be life-saving during the pandemic, and even if research reveals that cash transfers lift families out of poverty, debunking myths about recipients' increased dependence on aid (Banerjee et al. 2017, Fernandez and Olfindo 2011).

The tragedies of disaster capitalism that allow states to gather aid and secure investment deals on their behalf become hypervisible during the pandemic. Autocratic regimes mobilise resources to fund militarised responses to the pandemic. Disaster, this time in the form of a pandemic caused by COVID-19, magnified 'pre-existing vulnerability' among people and contexts produced by long years of capitalism, which now orchestrates a 'pandemic industrial complex' (Adams 2020). In the Philippines, government-initiated emergency responses to the pandemic will also impact the country in the long run. Duterte has called for the Philippine Congress to urgently pass the proposed amendments to the Public Service Act, Foreign Investments Act of 1991, and Retail Trade Liberalization Act of 2000, which will finally allow 100% foreign ownership of companies, industries, and public services.[12] The Duterte government peddles a rationale that the amended bills will alleviate suffering and rejuvenate the collapsing economy during the pandemic. Progressive groups and churches in the Philippines point out

that the passage of the bills will benefit foreign investors and lead to intensified land extraction and exploitation of natural resources and Filipino labour while violating the Constitution. If passed, these changes that exploited the conditions that arose during the pandemic will deepen what Franz Fanon calls 'continued agony' (2004) and what Lauren Berlant calls 'crisis ordinariness' (2011).

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Notes

1. This figure is based on an open-source map with data contributed by community pantry volunteers that can be found at https://saanyan.github.io/saanmaycommunitypantry/. Sources claim that there are over 2,000 pantries nationwide (Rappler 2020).

2. My lecture on CPM is at https://youtu.be/fwVuQKo4KSU.

3. The conversation is posted at https://www.facebook.com/groups/communitypantryph/posts/209425167347192. Excerpts in this article are my translation.

4. The political dynasty in Nabua has been in power for nearly three decades.

5. I hope to examine this in greater detail in a future work.

6. At the moment, I am not ready to discuss these in detail because of my proximity to many people appearing in my research.

7. The thread can be read on https://twitter.com/dadadocot/status/1385700787322425347. This thread was also reposted on the Community Pantry PH Facebook page, receiving over 400 user reactions and 100 comments: https://www.facebook.com/groups/communitypantryph/posts/208149487474760

8. The Spanish colonial period in the Philippines began in 1521 and ended in 1898 when Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States.

9. The Philippines was colonised three times, by Spain (1521 to 1898), by the U.S. (1898 to 1946), and Japan (1942-1945).

10. Cacao trees were imported from Central America in the 17th century via the Spanish Galleons.

11. The fundraiser can be found at https://www.paypal.com/pools/c/8yH3VmFKqq.

12. The 1987 Philippine Constitution prohibits full foreign ownership of companies.

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