

Anti-Copyright



**SOUTHEAST ASIAN
ANARCHIST LIBRARY**

Contagion of Mutual Aid in the Philippines

**An Initial Analysis of the Viral Community Pantry Initiative
as Emergent Agency in Times of Covid-19**

Emergent Agency Research Team

Emergent Agency Research Team
Contagion of Mutual Aid in the Philippines
An Initial Analysis of the Viral Community Pantry Initiative as Emergent
Agency in Times of Covid-19
April 19, 2021

Retrieved on 2021-04-21 from
<http://philippinesociology.com/contagion-of-mutual-aid-in-the-philippines/>

sea.theanarchistlibrary.org

April 19, 2021

Contents

Mutual Aid amid Precarity	7
Expanding Networks of Trust	9
Beyond Mutual Aid: What alternative is embedded in this viral initiative?	9
Defending Emergent Solidarities: Need for Vigilance against Repres- sion and Attempts to hijack the narrative of mutual help	10
References	11
Annexes	13
Related News Coverage and Social Media Stories	18

Tiaong Community Pantry
M Dia St., Brgy. Lumingon, Tiaong, Quezon
<https://www.facebook.com/rapplerdotcom/posts/4458787054142043>
Brgy. Tinio, Cabanatuan City
April 18, 2021
Kathleen Musni
<https://www.facebook.com/rapplerdotcom/posts/4459546270732788>

Related News Coverage and Social Media Stories

Tricycle drivers help repack rice, organize lines:

<https://www.facebook.com/PatrenGNon/posts/2880744538849910>

“Ito ang pamilya ni Randy Calumag, ang magsasaka ng Paniqui, Tarlac na nagbigay ng LIBRENG KAMOTE sa Community Pantry sa Maginhawa Street...”
(This is the family of Randy Calumag, a farmer from Paniqui, Tarlac, who gave free sweet potatoes to the Community Pantry at Maginhawa St.)

<https://www.facebook.com/MagsasakaOutlet/posts/289818026001499>

Tatay Elmer Coldero ng PISTON:

“Noong mangailangan ako, napakaraming tumulong at nagbigay. Panahon naman ngayon para tumulong at magbigay dahil napakarami pa ring nangangailangan.”

(“When I was the one in need, many people gave me help. It is now time to help and give because many are still in need.”)

<https://www.facebook.com/gmanews/posts/10159961267186977>

Mga mangingisda mula sa Binangonan, Rizal—

“Fishers from Binangonan, Rizal are set to donate more than 50 kilos of surplus produce to a Maginhawa-inspired community pantry in Quezon City later today.”

<https://twitter.com/denverINQ/status/1383630703317843969>

Interview with VP Leni Robredo for AP Non’s background, motivations for CP initiative (at mark 44:20 onwards):

https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?v=79731411191785&ref=watch_permalink

“Pagod na ako magreklamo. Pagod na ako sa inaction.”

(I am tired of complaining. I am tired of inaction.) <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/community-pantry-covid-19-lockdown-april-2021>

Through a research grant from Oxfam Philippines and as part of a multi-country research project of Oxfam GB, the Philippine Sociological Society (PSS) has an ongoing study on Emergent Agency in Times of Covid 19 in the Philippines. By tracing the networks of trust and by examining the alternatives that are embedded in community initiatives which sprung in response to the pandemic, the final report of this research project aims to contribute to public conversations and deliberations about trajectories for rebuilding in a post-Covid world. This initial analysis of the Community Pantry initiative that has become a viral phenomenon of mutual aid is one of several case studies that would be written by the Emergent Agency Research Team of the PSS.

Most coverage of the COVID-19 crisis concentrates on the negative impact of the disease and government’s inadequate response, such as the dehumanizing effects of restriction and lockdown on citizens. Often hidden are the ways in which individuals, communities, and grassroots organizations respond creatively to these new challenges. In many countries, ground-up responses emerge to address gaps in state measures as governments continue to push responsibility to communities. More local actors take action to address their needs and we have seen new and novel actions even as new issues continue to emerge in the ongoing global health crisis. These practices are providing insights on possibilities for collective action, new models of leadership, and mutual care.

Initiatives taken by a variety of stakeholders on their own to effect changes in their situation are referred to as emergent agencies. It includes the capacity of an individual, group, or community to actively and independently choose to do something that creates change in their lives or the lives of others. During the COVID-19 crisis, this could be seen as positive to effect change or negative as against the “greater good.” Regardless, these exercises in emergent agency can help inform “building back better” options at local and national level—policies and practices that can turn the crisis into a critical juncture for the design of a more equitable and sustainable future.

A little over a year after the government implemented and extended lockdowns as a precaution against the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), citizens of the Philippines continue to face many difficulties with regards to the uncontained health crisis and the government’s response or the lack thereof. According to the recent labour force survey performed by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) last February 2021, the unemployment rate increased to 8.8 percent,

equating to about 4.2 million Filipinos, as compared to the 8.7 percent, equating to about 4 million Filipinos, in the beginning of 2021. In the previous year, especially during the period of the strict Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), about 8.7 million people have lost their jobs and about 7.9 million people have become underemployed due to pay cuts from having shorter working hours (de Vera 2021). Filipinos, especially those belonging to the poorer sectors, have also experienced difficulties in securing their livelihoods due to the pandemic restrictions, and experienced hunger due to the disruption of food systems and the insufficient food aid coming from the local government (Ramos 2020).

Feelings of gloom and doom have also been widespread due to the impact brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) between June and August 2020, shows that the pandemic has created a devastating effect on the mental health of individuals as isolation, bereavement, fear, and loss of income are triggering mental health conditions or amplifying existing ones. Individuals may experience having insomnia and anxiety, as well as increased levels of alcohol consumption (France-Pressé 2020). Other sources of feelings of gloom and doom in the Philippines may also be caused by the continuous cases of human rights violations against the poor. According to the Human Rights Watch (2020), the “drug war” killings of the police have increased 50 percent during the strict lockdown period last April to July 2020. When asked about these killings, the police would routinely claim that these individuals fought back and provide that as the reason as to why they were killed (ABS-CBN News 2019).

Human rights violations against the poor, in relation to quarantine restrictions, have also been prevalent ever since the beginning of the pandemic. In the earlier days of the lockdown, many people belonging to the poorer sectors were often blamed by the government for being hard-headed or “pasaway” for not staying at home and for continuously violating the enforced quarantine rules (Esguerra 2020). People who have been caught past curfew hours have been subjected to inhumane punishments such as being put inside dog cages or coffins, forced under the scorching sun, paraded in the streets, emotionally abused, detained, or degraded (Gonzales 2020). These inhumane acts have resulted in casualties; the most recent one being the case of 28-year old Darren Peñaredondo from Cavite who was forced to do 300 squats as a punishment for breaching curfew rules (Ang 2021).

On April 2, 2021, the Philippines logged its highest single-day tally of COVID-19 cases. According to the Department of Health, the recorded 15, 310 new cases included a backlog of 3, 709 cases due to technical errors in the system last March

Payatas, Quezon City

April 18, 2021

Ma. Dianne Cariaga

https://twitter.com/diannecariaga_/status/1383584035188862986

Alcala, Pangasinan

April 18, 2021

Organized by: Alyansa ng mga Kabataang Alcaleno

<https://twitter.com/sumabutter/status/1383685174576128004>

Roxas Avenue, Davao City

April 18, 2021

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=4018335911554045&id=716461365074866

Baliuag, Bulacan

Baliwag Community Pantry

April 18, 2021

Organized by: Climate Change Center

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10222946146115503&id=1633960415

Bagumbayan Angono, Rizal

Bagumbayan Community Pantry

April 18, 2021

Organized by: JP De Borja

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=106352861575774&id=101813358696391

Bagumbong, Caloocan

SPPMA Community Pantry

April 18, 2021

Organized by: Saint Padre Pio Mission Area

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=510579230320064&id=106281110749880

Examiner St., Quezon City

Examiner Community Pantry

April 18, 2021

Organized by: Kalinaw Coffee Co.

https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=10226296295859369&id=1400450947

Brgy. Canaway, Iligan City

Iligan Community Pantry

April 18, 2021

Organized by: Lucia Silva & Luzanie Silva

<https://twitter.com/PhilippineStar/status/1383656882494005250>

Masterlist of Boracay Island Pantries: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1hral3-UIe1x5MQupnbIF0x0FZeAEjXw9DAhICRe0NEM/edit?fbclid=IwAR0b6zTIAa6PxaGoh-SF7LXzkh3DgldSSsv2ZRsl1ewznVBt4gK3QV_xW

Parang, Marikina City
 April 17, 2021
 Mara De Guzman
<https://twitter.com/inquirerdotnet/status/1383281254653562883>

Tabang Komunidad Pantry
 San Felipe, Naga City, Camarines Sur
 April 17, 2021
<https://www.facebook.com/tabangkomunidad/posts/1721875794680680>

Sta. Mesa Community Pantry
 April 17, 2021
 Ten Derillo
<https://www.facebook.com/ten.derillo/posts/10219931826102008>

Sta. Cruz Community Pantry, Sta. Cruz, Laguna
 April 17, 2021
 Josh Panganiban
<https://www.facebook.com/owa.gabinabajan/posts/4525789390784371>

P. Laygo St., Lipa City, Batangas
 April 17, 2021
<https://www.facebook.com/HelloLipa/posts/2229661327163914>

Leviste Highway, Lipa City, Batangas
 April 18, 2021
https://twitter.com/Dennis_Datu/status/1383730693998477320

Kalayaan mula sa Kagutuman
 Kalayaan Ave., Quezon City
 April 17, 2021
<https://www.facebook.com/iamraoulmanuel/posts/3979746392071759>

Panorama St., Concepcion Dos Marikina City
 April 18, 2021
 Lexa Magat
<https://twitter.com/athirdworldgirl/status/1383590346035060737>

Romans St. cor. Friendship Rd., Concepcion Uno, Marikina City
 April 18, 2021
<https://www.facebook.com/DoYouPermitIt/posts/3902539856506806>

31, 2021 (Magsambol 2021). The surge in COVID-19 cases due to the different variants that have entered the Philippines have caused strain as hospitals in Metro Manila have now been classified as “high-risk” as various intensive care units (ICUs) have been filled up or are almost filled-up to their maximum capacities (Tomacruz 2021). The Philippines has the second highest number of active COVID-19 cases in Southeast Asia with 926,052 total cases; 706,532 recoveries, 203,710 active cases, and 15,810 deaths as of April 17, 2021 (Abad 2021).

In the attempts to improve the current situation and to overcome the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, various individuals, groups, and institutions, have emerged with different projects to help fellow Filipinos in need. These emergent behaviours, in relation to collective behaviour, rise when people feel that the preexisting organizations fail to meet the demands of the public, when usual tasks and structures are deemed to be inefficient and inappropriate, and when communities feel the need to respond to a crisis situation by themselves (Drabek and McEntire 2003:99). An example of this emergence would be the recent Community Pantry Initiatives found in various places in the Philippines.

This initial analysis tries to capture the phenomenon of community pantries in the Philippines. Our data are mainly collected from online sources and the period covered is from the emergence of the first Community Pantry on April 14, 2021 up to the time it went viral on April 17 and to the time of the writing of this initial report on April 18, 2021.

The first community pantry was set up by Ana Patricia Non on April 14, 2021, on a street corner along Maginhawa St., Teachers Village, Quezon City. She herself has a small business that was adversely affected by the reimposition of the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) in Metro Manila. It was with help from family and friends that she was able to stock up food supplies during the lockdown. Having more than what she needed, she decided to share her excess supply with those who are more in need in her neighborhood.

With only a bamboo cart and an instruction written on a piece of cardboard that says, “Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan. Kumuha batay sa pangangailangan” (Give according to your ability. Take according to your need.), Non set up the Community Pantry in front of a former food park on Maginhawa Street, first buying vegetables from nearby vendors and later stocking the pantry with other essentials such as an alcohol sanitizer, canned goods, and rice. Soon, people flocked to the pantry, either to acquire the food that they need for the day, or to donate goods and supplies to replenish the pantry. Four days later, the community pantry became a viral phenomenon with many similar efforts sprouting all over the country attributing her act as the source of their inspiration.

It should be noted that in her original Facebook post which became viral, she recognizes that her act is not the solution to all of hunger (“Di nito masasagot ang root cause ng kagutuman”), but that it is enough to give people a fighting chance. The accompanying photo posted then shows in carton signages “Maginhawa Community Pantry” and the now famous quote “Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan. Kumuha batay sa pangangailangan.” (“Give what you can. Take only what you need.”)

Based on an initial mapping of 49 unique community pantries, we make the following observations:

- The first wave of replicators created their own community pantries from April 15 to 16, 2021 in nearby Matiyaga St., also in Teacher’s Village, and then Los Baños, Laguna; Sampaloc, Manila; and Bacoor, Cavite.
- In its viral stage, from April 17 onwards (date of writing of this report is April 18, 12 midnight), a total of 44 community pantries were set up from as far as Davao and Iligan in the south, Aklan in Visayas, and as far as Pangasinan in the north with majority in the National Capital Region. This represents an eightfold increase in a span of less than 24 hours. Other sources such as Ragene Andrea Palma identified 75 community pantries proving further the widespread public embrace of the phenomenon.
- 33 out of the 49 were initiated by private individuals or families while 16 were initiated by organizations such as private enterprises, civic organizations, and youth groups to name a few.
- Other forms of crowd support are emerging. For example, digital cartographers are mapping the locations of these community pantries that have been sprouting all over the country. They are also mobilizing the public to help update this map that would enable donors and clients to locate the Community Pantry that is nearest to them.
bit.ly/communitypantrymap
- An indication that the Community Pantry initiative is steadily gaining ground as an organized response is the dissemination of infographic materials prepared by organized groups to provide the public with knowledge and information about the process of setting up Community Pantries.
- Pictures posted on social media show that four out of the forty-four community pantries carried other issue-based slogans in signages displayed on-site or in their social media posts. These posts carried calls for free mass testing

Brgy. Malanday, Patis, San Mateo, Rizal

April 17, 2021

Lief Reyes

<https://www.facebook.com/lief.reyes/posts/3817909738244327>

<https://twitter.com/inquirerdotnet/status/1383314291286179842>

Legal Rd. cor. Premium St., Project 8, Quezon City

April 17, 2021

J Anne Alberto Habil

<https://www.facebook.com/jen.habil/posts/485112142860605>

Mother Ignacia Ave., Quezon City

April 17, 2021

Allia Acosta and JM Lanuza

<https://www.facebook.com/alliaacosta/posts/10157625079157513>

<https://twitter.com/rapplerdotcom/status/1383660689240195072>

Caloocan Community Pantry, 6th St., C3 Caloocan

April 17, 2021

Ma. Theresa Punzalan

<https://www.facebook.com/aynamooo/posts/10219520435341810>

<https://www.facebook.com/arkipelagonewscalooacan/posts/141694304629637>

Marikina Heights

April 17, 2021

Cedric John Moneda

<https://www.facebook.com/cjsmoneda/posts/2818159311729898>

Brgy. Balibago, Angeles City, Pampanga

April 17, 2021

Hazel Day Gil

<https://www.facebook.com/dghanne/posts/1579313012267397>

Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya

April 17, 2021

<https://www.facebook.com/bayombongpantry/posts/105735791648089>

Bulabog, Boracay

April 17, 2021

Joana Rose Roman

<https://www.facebook.com/roman.jrose/posts/890962371746553>

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=103088828588827&id=102968148

<https://www.facebook.com/energyfmmkalibo107.7/posts/3983695115011872>

<https://twitter.com/cnnphilippines/status/1383375732517203972>

Brgy. Batong Malake, Los Banos, Laguna

April 16, 2021

Ja Abdel

<https://twitter.com/rapplerdotcom/status/1382962583909634048>

<https://twitter.com/PhilippineStar/status/1382987279816302595>

Bahayang Pag-asa, Bacoor, Cavite

Louie Marie and Corrine Dela Cerna

April 16, 2021(Started gathering donations)

April 19, 2021 (Planned date of operations)

<https://www.facebook.com/louiemarie01/posts/10158058949128317>

Matatag St., Quezon City

April 17, 2021

With:

contact numbers for reporting cases of violence against women

Contact numbers for free HIV testing

<https://www.facebook.com/TheKejOfGlory/posts/1022367775724142>

Loyola Heights Community Pantry, Loyola Heights, Quezon City

April 17, 2021

Ia Marañon

<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10208579815009129&set=a.1586685883344>

<https://twitter.com/rafalavina/status/1383368150658420741>

Intramuros, Manila

April 17, 2021

<https://twitter.com/PhilippineStar/status/1383358899378524168>

Tulong Obrero Community Pantry, Narra St., Quezon City

April 17, 2021

Elmer Cordero ng PISTON 6

<https://www.facebook.com/gmanews/posts/10159961267186977>

<https://www.facebook.com/ian.porquia/posts/2742495192633877>

Southie Community Pantry

Purok 5, Sucat, Muntinlupa

Organized by: South Snippets

April 17, 2021(Started gathering donations)

April 19, 2021 (Planned date of operation)

<https://www.facebook.com/southsnippets/posts/2475988485858521>

or an end to violence against women but not directly attacking the current administration. The rest contained the name of the community pantry usually taken after their location.

- All of the community pantries covered by this quick survey carried variations of the original quote from Ana Patricia Non, “Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan. Kumuha batay sa pangangailangan.” (“Give according to your ability. Take according to your need.”) This was translated to Cebuano by the community pantry in the city of Iligan in Lanao del Norte as such: “Mukuha sumala sa kinahanglan, muhatag base sa kakayahan,” and in Bicolano in the province of Camarines Sur: “Magtao base sa kakayahan, magkuha base sa kaipuhan.” It was also translated to Ilocano in the province of Pangasinan: “Mangala babaenti kasapulan, mangted babaenti kabaelan,” and also into English in Aklan.
- The quote lifted from the first community pantry seemed to have provided the “viral” element as seen in the adaptation of this quote by all community pantries covered by this quick research from April 14 to 18, 2021.

Mutual Aid amid Precarity

While started by a private individual in Maginhawa Street, Bgy. Teacher’s Village in Quezon City on April 14, 2021, a significant segment of the viral wave of community pantries emerged from established (rather than emergent) trust and social networks with shared frustration over the government’s COVID response, e.g. the absence of subsidies in the second major round of lockdown starting April 2021. It is worth noting that these more organized formations undertook community kitchens and collective gardening among other forms of emergent agencies even at the start of the pandemic, but although publicized, these initiatives did not catch the imagination of the public the same way that the current community pantries did.

Putting up community pantries is not a novel idea or unique to the Philippines. It is a modality of mutual help that is already being done in other countries even under normal conditions. Thus, the viral spread of the Community Pantry initiative in the Philippines under the harsh conditions of ECQ24 is simply phenomenal. Media accounts, images, and testimonials about how meager resources are selflessly shared and responsibly claimed between and among those who were hardest hit and most vulnerable in this Covid-19 pandemic seem to have boosted the

morale of a desperate public that is bogged down by feelings of gloom and doom as the National Capital Region is thrown under hard lockdown for the 2nd time in a year. And probably, there lies the rub. For the precariat, these community pantries enable translocal mutual aid between and among them, and for the increasingly disenfranchised segments of the middle class, these community pantries have become outlets of their pent up exasperation over the absence of official action. Donations of food crops by farmers from distant agricultural communities have been filling makeshift pantries in the urban centers.

The second round of ECQ was now even more economically debilitating for many sectors. Entire households have become infected with the virus and the increasing death rates due to the raging pandemic is no longer just a perception for many families but has sadly become very real for many families. In the face of all these, the general public is confronted by a failing health care system and the uncertainty of the much needed roll out of a public vaccination program. The Department of Labor and Employment reported that in the first three days of the April 2021 lockdown, 8,000 workers lost their jobs. This is over and above the 118,200 workers who lost employment since the beginning of the pandemic. The prospects are not bright with the country's GDP remaining at its worst level since the Second World War. Government has begun distributing aid in the National Capital Region but many Local Government Units who are tasked to release the funds are experiencing delays because of many reasons. Meanwhile, there are harrowing stories of COVID positive patients being turned away from hospitals because they are at full capacity as the figures of rise among the infected and those who succumb to the illness.

The establishment of community pantries may thus be considered a gauge for a solidifying public opinion on the inadequacy of government response to the pandemic on two fronts: 1) providing economic subsidy and aid for those greatly affected by the lockdown 2) and the lack of an appropriate and comprehensive health response to the pandemic. These community pantries resonate with the public's dire needs and brewing discontent in the context of a worsening economic and health care situation.

Another narrative thread in the viral community pantry is that the phenomenon debunks dominant opinions on perceived behaviors of the poor and the needy. The sectors who have kept the pantries well-stocked and who have taken from these pantries no more than what they need for the day, are the sectors who are consistently blamed by the current administration as the culprit for the spread of the virus because they are "pasaway" (undisciplined). Those who have less have shown, according to reports on the ground, greater generosity and graciousness

[/www.rappler.com/nation/metro-manila-icu-capacity-high-risk-march-20-2021](https://www.rappler.com/nation/metro-manila-icu-capacity-high-risk-march-20-2021)

Tse-tung, Mao. 1943. "Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership." Marxists Internet Archive. Accessed April 19, 2021 https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-3/mswv3_13.htm

World Health Organization. 2020. "COVID-19 disrupting mental health services in most countries, WHO survey." Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://www.who.int/news/item/05-10-2020-covid-19-disrupting-mental-health-services-in-most-countries-who-survey>

Annexes

Rappler's list of community pantries: <https://www.rappler.com/moveph/list-community-pantries-where-you-can-donate>

Maginhawa St., Quezon City

begun by: Ana Patricia Non

First Facebook post: (April 14, 2021)

<https://www.facebook.com/PatrengNon/posts/2880053828918981>

Tumulong ang tricycle drivers sa pag-repack ng bigas (Tricycle drivers assist in repacking rice)

April 15, 2021:

<https://www.facebook.com/PatrengNon/posts/2880744538849910>

Instructions sa pagtulung, April 15:

<https://www.facebook.com/PatrengNon/posts/2880907235500307>

Matiyaga St., Quezon City

April 16, 2021

<https://www.facebook.com/esfernando/posts/4398629596818177>

P. Noval St., Manila

April 16, 2021

Toots Vergara

<https://www.facebook.com/toots.vergara/posts/10158109438678603>

Brgy. Caniogan, Pasig City

April 16, 2021

begun by: Iam Pasig Food Tour Group

Put up by: Ingrid Mediarito

<https://twitter.com/PhilippineStar/status/1383663011970174978>

Ang, Matthias. 2021. "Philippines man dies after being forced to do 300 squats for breaking Covid-19 curfew." Mothership. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://mothership.sg/2021/04/philippines-man-300-squats-break-curfew-dead/>

Conde, Carlos. 2020. "Killings in Philippines Up 50 Percent During Pandemic." Human Rights Watch. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/08/killings-philippines-50-percent-during-pandemic>

De Vera, Ben. 2021. "Pandemic casualties: 4.2M lose jobs, 7.9M suffer pay cuts." Inquirer.net. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://business.inquirer.net/320462/pandemic-casualties-4-2m-lose-jobs-7-9m-suffer-pay-cuts>.

Drabek, Thomas E., and David A. McEntire. 2003. "Emergent Phenomena And The Sociology Of Disaster: Lessons, Trends And Opportunities From The Research Literature." *Disaster Prevention and Management: An International Journal* 12(2):97–112.

Esguerra, Darryl John. 2020. "Palace: Filipinos should be ashamed as PH tops with most COVID-19 cases in SEA." Inquirer.net. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1259636/fwd-nakakahiya-palace-says-filipinos-should-be-ashamed-as-ph-tops-asean-with-most-virus-cases>

Gonzales, Cathrine. 2020. "'Human rights violations' amid quarantine enforcement add to COVID-19 blues." Inquirer.net. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1312093/human-rights-violations-amid-quarantine-enforcement-add-to-covid-19-blues>

Magsambol, Bonz. 2021. "PH logs highest-ever new COVID-19 cases at 15,310." Rappler.com. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/coronavirus-cases-philippines-april-2-2021>

Mapa, Dennis. 2021. "Employment Situation in February 2021." Labor Force. Philippine Statistics Authority. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://psa.gov.ph/content/employment-situation-february-2021>.

Marx, Karl. n.d. "Critique of the Gotha Programme." Marxists Internet Archive. Accessed April 19, 2021. (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/gotha/ch01.htm>).

Ramos, Mariejo. 2020. "Pandemic weakens food security in urban poor communities." Inquirer.net. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1341286/pandemic-weakens-food-security-in-urban-poor-communities>

Roque, Harry. 2021. "Presidential Spokesperson Harry Roque on the community pantry." PTV News. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://www.ptvnews.ph/presidential-spokesperson-harry-roque-on-the-community-pantry/>

Tomacruz, Sofia. 2021. "Metro Manila ICU capacity now 'high-risk' as COVID-19 surge continues." Rappler.com. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/coronavirus-cases-philippines-april-2-2021>

by offering their meager surplus items and taking only what they need. Anecdotal reports also say that it is the (lower) middle classes, who have also been hit hard economically by the pandemic, who have shown less restraint in getting items from the collective coffers.

Expanding Networks of Trust

The consistent use of the Maginhawa Pantry slogan across established pantries all over the country—from Davao to Iligan, to Aklan and all the way to the north in Pangasinan, indicates that it has struck a chord amongst those who replicated the act. On the one hand, it can be seen as a searing albeit coded critique of the State perceived by many to have been engaged in a dirty war against its declared enemies from the left amidst the deadly pandemic.

However it is also possible that the quote may have also spoken to the replicators and provided them with inspiration to get out of the comfort of their immediate family bubbles and recognize the shared needs of their neighbors in the community. The community pantries indicate the emergence of expanding networks of trust established among communities because of the pandemic. As the economic crisis brought by the pandemic stretches on, communities are realizing that the protracted crises puts everyone—the urban poor, rural poor and the middle classes in the same state of precarity. The quote: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs," is the new slogan of the lower classes in the time of the pandemic.

It connotes a contagion of mutual aid for the similarly situated and is an oblique critique of the greed and callousness that for some are clearly named and for others remain unnamed and are silent about. This outpouring of solidarity initiated by the middle class and complemented by the patronage and support from the lower classes could be a manifestation of this emergent solidarity.

Beyond Mutual Aid: What alternative is embedded in this viral initiative?

The original quote from the Maginhawa pantry reads: "Magbigay ayon sa kakayahan. Kumuha batay sa pangangailangan." It could be an adaptation from Marx's writings in his Critique of the Gotha Program: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"²⁵, although the substance and the

context when Marx wrote this alluded to his imaginary of a communist future. It cannot be said that all who emulated the original pantry in Maginhawa share the same political views considering that only a few posts on-site and in social media displayed overt political messages. But that it became “viral” indicates that these community pantries and what they stand for resonated with the public – temperance against greed, compassion over indifference, and mutual care in the face of institutional neglect.

Given the provenance of this quote, it can be interpreted as a courageous declaration of a counter narrative against neoliberal and authoritarian discourses as it highlights socialist principles. In some community pantries, the Maoist principle of “from the masses, to the masses” (“mula sa masa, tungo sa masa”) were displayed in cardboard signages. It can be said that the current community pantry phenomenon, on the one hand, is a performative condemnation not only about the incompetence of the present administration but also a rejection of the capability of the current elite-driven system to effectively address the needs of the most vulnerable sectors of society.

The tremendous public support behind the community pantries with the eight-fold increase in number after it went viral in April 17, 2021 is indicative at the very least of necessary policy changes in government’s response to the acute economic crises that the pandemic has brought. Government should release subsidies to the poor and improve their health response to the satisfaction of the public who, seeing the absence of the State, have created their own networks of mutual aid to get by as manifested by the community pantries.

Defending Emergent Solidarities: Need for Vigilance against Repression and Attempts to hijack the narrative of mutual help

Just four days in after the first community pantry was initiated and a day after it became viral, various interests are already trying to hijack the narrative. Presidential spokesperson Harry Roque issued a statement lauding the community pantries as manifestations of the Filipino’s bayanihan spirit. Such an interpretation effectively de-politicizes the community initiatives and coopts these as mere acts of civic duty. If they are not coopting, the same interests dismiss these initiatives as staged and organized by the usual suspects – political enemies of the administra-

tion from the so-called yellowtards, or dilawans to the radical left represented by the CPP-NPA-NDF.

In a facebook post, Jong Juguilon reported that signages placed in the Sta. Mesa community pantry were removed by police. There are now increasing reports of replicators being interrogated by police asking them about their background and their organizational affiliations.

The very real danger is that there are efforts this early by certain sectors to hijack the narrative and to rob this movement of its optimism and radical content. What should not be lost in the discursive field is that the establishment of community pantries is a transgressive act that lets us see what may lie beyond the limits imposed by the “natural order of things” and that these emergent agencies point us to the possibility of new political horizons.

The community pantries in the Philippines are representations of a different kind of contagion, the good kind representing the best of our fellow Filipinos who engage in collective acts of mutual aid. They are manifestations of new solidarities that are forged out of the collective trauma faced during this pandemic. Now that the people have congregated in these emancipating “viral” spaces, these should be defended against the cynicism of those who fear their yet unawakened political potential. The community pantries are not rally or demonstration sites as of yet, but the material conditions of want and frustration could turn them into overt sites of resistance in the very near future.

References

- Abad, Michelle. 2021. “Philippines now has over 200,000 active COVID-19 cases.” Rappler.com. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/coronavirus-cases-philippines-april-17-2021>
- ABS-CBN News. 2019. “5,000 ‘nanlaban’ killings, zero records? Rights group blasts slays without probes.” Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/19/19/5000-nanlaban-killings-zero-records-rights-group-blasts-slays-without-probes>
- Agence France-Presse. 2020. “Mental health toll of pandemic ‘devastating’ – WHO.” Rappler.com. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://www.rappler.com/world/global-affairs/mental-health-toll-coronavirus-pandemic-devastating-who>