

## **The Matter of Class: COVID-19 in the Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, I argue that we should look at the Philippine context and confront the ontological question of what it means to be poor in the Philippines. Although there seems to be similarities between anti-black and anti-poor oppressive systems in the United States and the Philippines, there is a huge difference between the situations of the two countries. How can a social feminist activist lens, such as that of bell hooks', contribute to the understanding of deep-seated class issues brought about by such structures amidst the virus outbreak? Political solidarity dictates that we should be in touch, and value class differences and complexities. While being Black in the US is dangerous, being poor in the Philippines is to be neglected and be reduced to *nothing*. As such, we should be reminded that in the Philippines, and everywhere else in the world, poor lives matter, too.

**Keywords:** Class, COVID-19, Philippines, bell hooks, #BlackLivesMatter

## Introduction

The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic highlights the results of various systems of privilege all over the world. In the United States, the tragic effects of such systems have been attributed to race privilege. Since privilege is an invisible package of unearned assets, the existence of certain immunities may be difficult to acknowledge for particular groups and societies. In the case of the Philippines, policy-related mishandlings of the pandemic may be attributed to class privilege. Despite the magnified disparities between the rich and the poor during the COVID-19 outbreak, there seems to be a blatant disregard for the implications of class dimensions on such social phenomena in the country.

In the US, the questioning of race privilege is evident in recent protests against the current administration for its lack of success in protecting its own citizens during the pandemic. Oppressive systems have been accused of causing massive job layoffs and devastating Black lives.<sup>1</sup> This disapproval of racial capitalism<sup>2</sup> and various mass protests have led to the exponential growth of activist movements to a social tipping point in the US.<sup>3</sup> In the Philippines, however, although class insensitivities are reflected in present COVID-19 realities, critiques have not really been applied on a practical level or examined thoroughly to a theoretical degree.

Western philosophers and critical race theorists have been focusing on the effects of racialized oppressions during the pandemic. For example, Scapp raised the ontological problem of the lack of a legitimate place of people of color and what it actually

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<sup>1</sup> "Feminist Studies Editorial Collective Statement - June 3, 2020," accessed June 8, 2020, <http://www.feministstudies.org/statement-6-3-20.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Larry Buchanan, Quoc Trung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel, "Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in U.S. History," *The New York Times*, July 3, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>.

means to be a Black person in the US.<sup>4</sup> Scapp asserts that *being in the world*, particularly *being* Black in the US is complex, dangerous, and deadly. Haslanger, on the other hand, when referring to the colored population in the US, questions who counts as essential workers during a pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Scholars acknowledge that racist laws and policies, and the theoretical framework of anti-blackness, have led to US society's apparent inability to recognize the humanity of Black people.<sup>6</sup> The situation has been dubbed a "pandemic within a pandemic".<sup>7</sup>

While Black lives have been badly affected by the pandemic in the US, the poor have suffered severely in the Philippines. The number of poor Filipinos is projected to increase by 1.5 million,<sup>8</sup> with more than 7.5 million unemployed. Lower classes' middle class aspirations may even be delayed by 25 years.<sup>9</sup> Despite this jarring forecast, class privilege issues and immunities remain taken for granted, and Filipinos continuously move on "with life as usual".<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ron Scapp, "Being in One's Place: Race, Ontology and the Killing of Trayvon Martin," *Ethnic Studies Review* 37, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 151–53.

<sup>5</sup> Jeremiah Joven Joaquin, "Social Construction & Social Critique with Sally Haslanger." Philosophy & What Matters, August 30, 2020. YouTube video, 1:13:15. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A5RyZiMSmM0&t=2755s>.

<sup>6</sup> Kihana Miraya Ross, "Call It What It Is: Anti-Blackness," *The New York Times*, June 4, 2020, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/04/opinion/george-floyd-anti-blackness.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Sheryl Gay Stolberg, "'Pandemic Within a Pandemic': Coronavirus and Police Brutality Roil Black Communities," *The New York Times*, June 7, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/07/us/politics/blacks-coronavirus-police-brutality.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Michelle Abad, "Pandemic Could Push 1.5 Million Filipinos into Poverty – Study," Rappler, accessed September 15, 2020, <https://rappler.com/nation/coronavirus-pandemic-push-million-filipinos-poverty-pids-study/>.

<sup>9</sup> Cai Ordinario and Cai Ordinario, "Pandemic May Delay Poor Pinoys' Middle Class Aspiration by 25 Years–PIDS Study | Cai Ordinario," BusinessMirror, August 6, 2020, <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/08/06/pandemic-may-delay-poor-pinoys-middle-class-aspiration-by-25-years-pids-study/>.

<sup>10</sup> Lenore Manderson and Susan Levine, "COVID-19, Risk, Fear, and Fall-Out," *Medical Anthropology* 0, no. 0 (March 26, 2020): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740.2020.1746301>.

In the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, I argue that we should look at the Philippine context and confront the ontological question of what it means to be poor in the country. On a conceptual level, how can we examine class matters and determine the situations and structures that reinforce class hierarchies? Although it seems that there may be parallelisms and stark differences between anti-Black and anti-poor oppressive systems in the United States and the Philippines respectively, is there something we can learn from the theoretical framework of anti-blackness?

Class theorists have long discussed the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, or the capitalist and working classes. For a divergent understanding, I propose the use of the lens of feminist cultural critic and social activist bell hooks to dissect deep-seated class issues brought about by the virus outbreak. How can the theoretical position of bell hooks help acknowledge and address class matters in the Philippine COVID-19 context? When we look at the interlocking factors of oppression such as gender, race and class, we see that while these factors affect each other, there seems to be a core factor (such as class) that reinforces marginalizing systems during the pandemic.

## **The Philippine Context**

With approximately 400,000 cases and 7,647 COVID-19 related deaths as of November 9, 2020,<sup>11</sup> one cannot help but wonder why so many lives have been lost to the pandemic in the Philippines. It seems that class oppression and out-of-touch class privilege play a huge part in this phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> Case in point, when a Black protester claims that he is just as likely to die from

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<sup>11</sup> "Coronavirus Death Toll and Trends - Worldometer," 2020, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/coronavirus-death-toll/>.

<sup>12</sup> ABS-CBN News, "'You Have Caused Me so Much Sadness': Heart Responds to Being Called 'out-of-Touch Privileged,'" ABS-CBN News, accessed June 8, 2020, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/entertainment/06/05/20/you-have-caused-me-so-much-sadness-heart-responds-to-being-called-out-of-touch-privileged>.

police brutality as he would from COVID-19 in the US,<sup>13</sup> poor Filipinos declare that they are more horrified by the thought of dying from hunger than catching the virus.<sup>14</sup> It is as if priorities of governments have nothing to do with Black lives in the US and poor lives in the Philippines. Governments deny this of course, but such is quite obvious particularly in the Philippine context.

Like most countries all over the world, the Philippine government enforced strict lockdowns to contain the outbreak. Termed as community quarantines, lockdowns were enforced in modified, enhanced, or general levels. People were not allowed to leave their residences unless they were “essential” workers. Daily-waged employees and other workers had no means of income at all, notwithstanding the fact that the country had implemented “one of the strictest and longest lockdowns enforced in Southeast Asia” (even stricter than Italy and Spain).<sup>15</sup>

To curb the citizens’ hunger, indigent households were given minimal cash relief, and non-qualifying families were given food items. Some low-wage earners demanding relief were even hit and arrested by the police in a violent encounter.<sup>16</sup> Such ill treatment was condemned by a labor group citing the fact that the administration “should have placed these communities on the top of their priorities and should [have] heavily considered their plight when they decided to implement the ECQ” (Enhanced Community Quarantine). Similarly, some jeepney drivers were

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<sup>13</sup> Stolberg, “Pandemic Within a Pandemic.”

<sup>14</sup> Rambo Talambong and Jodesz Gavilan, “Walang-Wala Na’: Poor Filipinos Fear Death from Hunger More than Coronavirus,” Rappler, accessed September 15, 2020, <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/in-depth/256695-poor-filipinos-fear-death-from-hunger-more-than-coronavirus>.

<sup>15</sup> Raul Dancel, “Coronavirus: Sweeping, Strict Manila Lockdown Ends on June 1, after Three Months,” Text, The Straits Times, May 28, 2020, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/coronavirus-president-rodrigo-duterte-set-to-lift-manila-lockdown-after-3-months>.

<sup>16</sup> Rambo Talambong, “Quezon City Residents Demanding Help amid Lockdown Arrested by Police,” Rappler, accessed June 8, 2020, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/256628-residents-quezon-city-protesting-help-coronavirus-lockdown-arrested-by-police-april-1-2020>.

arrested for protesting on their loss of livelihood. Such a protest was held due to hunger and the non-receipt of cash assistance.<sup>17</sup>

In “a bid to salvage an economy battered by unemployment and new signs of poverty,” the lockdowns had to be lifted.<sup>18</sup> Capitalists, such as Presidential Adviser on Entrepreneurship Joey Concepcion, claimed that “we cannot just stay at home for the next months...It has to be a balance between health and economy.”<sup>19</sup> As such, containment measures were relaxed and some jobs were restored despite public transportation still being limited. Earlier lockdown directives to protect the poor and vulnerable sectors appeared to be counterproductive.

### **bell hooks on Class**

How can we understand these deep-seated class matters brought about by the health crisis? We may use a Marxist lens to expound on class theory. As such, we know of the class struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Capitalist Concepcion’s advice to immediately open the Philippine economy without much consideration for the proletariat can simply be understood as the bourgeoisie’s intrinsic nature to be oppressive and exploitative to its workers. Another way of looking at it though is to contextualize class in bell hooks’ theoretical framework, which treats class as more than just the relationship between capitalists and working classes.

Social activist, feminist, and cultural critic bell hooks is more concerned with the invisibility of discourses on class and the role

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<sup>17</sup> Meg Adonis, “6 Jeepney Drivers Protesting Loss of Livelihood Face Raps | Inquirer News,” accessed June 9, 2020, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1285949/6-jeepney-drivers-protesting-loss-of-livelihood-face-raps>.

<sup>18</sup> Ralph Jennings, “Philippines Allows Soft Post-Lockdown Reopening to Avert Dire Economic Fall | Voice of America - English,” accessed June 8, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/philippines-allows-soft-post-lockdown-reopening-avert-dire-economic-fall>.

<sup>19</sup> “Duterte Adviser Bats for Gradual Reopening of Malls, Restaurants, Public Transport after Luzon Lockdown,” *cnn*, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/4/16/malls-restaurants-public-transport-gradual-operations-COVID-lockdown.html>.

it plays in systems of oppression. hooks builds on Marx and Gramsci's works but claims that although these provide theoretical paradigms they "rarely offered tools for confronting the complexity of class in daily life".<sup>20</sup> She refers to such works as left politics that focus too much on power dynamics but somewhat ignore given realities. hooks asserts the need for a type of politics that intervenes in class warfare and continuously criticizes affluent classes while coming up with strategic solutions to empower the poor.<sup>21</sup> More than just looking at predatory capitalism, we must also look at the fact that most of the poor may actually be unemployed.

How do members of classes interact with each other or suppress each other, and what mechanisms reinforce such class distinctions? Despite the obvious differences and conflicts between the rich and the poor, talking about race or gender is much more fashionable than talking about class.<sup>22</sup> The subject of class makes people nervous, tense, or uncertain because it reminds them of where they stand. People are silent on class matters because they fear losing their class statuses once they show concern or affinity for the lower classes. For example, the middle class fear that they may lose their comfortable lives if they side with the poor.<sup>23</sup>

The problem with class is that "while it has always been obvious that some folks have more money than other folks, class difference and classism are rarely overtly apparent, or they are not acknowledged when present".<sup>24</sup> Class oppression is a hidden evil not readily discussed as sexism and racism. "The evils of racism and, much later, sexism, were easier to identify and challenge than the evils of classism. We live in a society where the poor have no public voice."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (Psychology Press, 2000), 43.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 8-10.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

What is class? According to hooks, it goes beyond Marx's definition of the relationship to the means of production. Class involves one's behavior, basic assumptions, demeanor, expectations, concepts of the future, problems and how to solve them, and how one thinks, feels, or acts.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, class hierarchies and disparities are enforced in various set-ups such as familial, educational, work-related, and others. For example, the class of a father would be different from a mother considering the type (or absence) of work (in or outside the home) he or she is engaged in.

Given these classes within classes, the condition of underclasses (such as women and children) should seriously be considered by the government in policies and programs. hooks gives specific examples of how to eliminate class subordination, such as welfare systems, low income housing and other economic alternatives. Furthermore, she zeroes in on the redistribution of wealth. Criticizing modern capitalism and economic imperatives, hooks prescribes modifications in economic systems through "taxation and wealth-transfer programs, such as Social Security, to provide necessities".<sup>27</sup> It is in the withholding of resources that power is maintained by the upper echelons of society despite the economic benefit of sharing resources across classes.<sup>28</sup>

hooks stresses the importance of sharing resources, and this, she claims, showcases solidarity with the poor. A solution she proposes is communalism, or the creation of practical strategies by those with greater class privilege thereby driving the sharing of resources.<sup>29</sup> Like democratic socialists, hooks proposes the redistribution of wealth in a way that would lessen the oppression of the poor.<sup>30</sup> A specific example that hooks gives is for richer folk "to support a poor family for a year and (the government would) write that off their taxes".<sup>31</sup> This, she claims,

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> hooks, *Where We Stand*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 158–59.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 129.



is public responsibility or “the concept of independence and accountability for the collectiveness of all citizens”, which happens to be “the foundation of any truly democratic and just society”.<sup>32</sup>

To be concerned with matters of class is to organize a collective class struggle, a revolution if one wills, and a movement that does an “in-your-face critique of capitalist greed”.<sup>33</sup> hooks acknowledges how the class conflict is embedded in racialized and gendered systems as well, and calls for the creation of more just economic systems that can lessen the gap between the rich and the poor.<sup>34</sup> The starting off of this critique is the interrogation of working or (even unemployed) class experiences. This is not a kind of empathy but rather a solidarity that uses the tools of oppositional gazing or the recognition of the presence or absence of privilege, and border crossing or concerted exchange.<sup>35</sup>

## COVID-19 and the Philippine Classes

The Filipino poor have been striving to speak of their woes during the outbreak. This has been one of the reasons some of the unemployed and jobless have been holding protests and getting arrested as a consequence. When Filipino “high(er) income households have stocked up on food and other necessities”, “poor families were left at the mercy of promised government relief”, basically, to fend for themselves.<sup>36</sup> The subsidies were obviously not enough to sustain livelihoods during the enhanced community quarantines.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

<sup>35</sup> Hazel Biana, “Extending Bell Hooks’ Feminist Theory,” *Journal of International Women’s Studies* 21, no. 1 (February 24, 2020): 13–29.

<sup>36</sup> Christian Esguerra, “Virus Spread Blows Lid off ‘Social Distance’ between Poor and Privileged,” ABS-CBN News, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/03/18/20/coronavirus-philippines-covid19-quarantine-social-distance-poor-privileged>.

As opposed to the lower classes, despite the complaints of the middle class, none have been arrested so far. The Philippine middle class is expected to air their woes on social media - and their “disdain for the poor is nothing new”.<sup>37</sup> Jose Ramon Albert, a senior fellow at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies, merely dismissed these class concerns as heightened emotions due to self-isolation during the lockdowns.<sup>38</sup>

When it came to COVID-19 testing, the most vulnerable poor sectors in highly urban areas were neglected- as testing appeared to be a privilege for the affluent. This has been a “hot-button issue given the limited supply of testing kits in the Philippines,”<sup>39</sup> as some elite senators and public officials were prioritized in testing despite the absence of symptoms or non-exposure to persons under investigation (PUIs). In Senegal, authorities have recognized the need for affordable and quick testing given its poor population, thus, they developed a test which only costs USD\$1.00 each.<sup>40</sup> As opposed to a hefty Php4,000-Php13,000 per test in private facilities in the Philippines, their measure actually contributed to the control of the outbreak in Senegal.

During the strictest lockdowns, some members of the Philippine middle class complain of how they “work hard and pay taxes, but the poor always get assistance and some just use the money to gamble.”<sup>41</sup> Such pushback has led to fears of a class war, that the Philippine Senate debated on whether the middle class should receive subsidies as well despite limited government

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<sup>37</sup> Cliff Venzon, “Duterte’s Cash Aid for Poor Filipinos Draws Middle Class Pushback,” *Nikkei Asian Review*, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Duterte-s-cash-aid-for-poor-Filipinos-draws-middle-class-pushback>.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Esguerra, “Virus Spread Blows Lid off ‘Social Distance’ between Poor and Privileged.”

<sup>40</sup> Steven Friedman, “South Africa Is Failing on COVID-19 Because Its Leaders Want to Emulate the First World,” *The Conversation*, accessed October 9, 2020, <http://theconversation.com/south-africa-is-failing-on-covid-19-because-its-leaders-want-to-emulate-the-first-world-142732>.

<sup>41</sup> Venzon, “Duterte’s Cash Aid for Poor Filipinos Draws Middle Class Pushback.”

funds.<sup>42</sup> In Pasig City, the local government provided such social amelioration or subsidy to both the rich and poor income families but the Mayor, Vico Sotto, “urged more fortunate families to refuse to accept the cash assistance or to donate them instead”.<sup>43</sup> This move was in acknowledgement of the fact that even members of the middle class may have lost their means of income due to the quarantine and that the upper classes have more resources that they may want to share.

When it came to food and transportation, while the rich and affluent get to use their cars and have their groceries and food delivered in the safety of their homes, the rest of the Philippine masses have to battle it out in cramped wet markets and walk or bike themselves to death. In more advanced economies, such as Singapore and the Czech Republic, public transportation remained available for the masses during the lockdowns. Recently, there have been talks of lowering the social distancing measures in public transport - which would put the masses at more risk.<sup>44</sup> A pro-poor measure would be to map routes “onto demographic data, such as income levels for different areas” instead to ensure that “public transport serves those who need it most” rather than just throwing the masses straight to the pit of the virus.<sup>45</sup>

The macro-policies of the national government includes the provision for social protection. Local governments sought to relieve people from the sudden shock of the pandemic through

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<sup>42</sup> Pauline Macaraig, “Should the Middle Class Receive Subsidy?,” Rappler, accessed June 9, 2020, <http://www.rappler.com/newsbreak/iq/259192-who-are-middle-class-citizens-subsidy-philippines>.

<sup>43</sup> Neil Arwin Mercado, “Pasig’s Own Amelioration Program Covers All Rich and Poor,” INQUIRER.net, April 15, 2020, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1258981/pasigs-own-amelioration-program-covers-all-rich-and-poor>.

<sup>44</sup> Sofia Tomacruz, “Medical Experts Oppose Reduced Distancing on Public Transport,” Rappler, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/medical-experts-oppose-reducing-physical-distancing-public-transport>.

<sup>45</sup> “Here Are 3 Ways AI Could Help You Commute Safely after COVID-19,” World Economic Forum, accessed October 10, 2020, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/07/here-are-3-ways-social-distancing-could-change-public-transport-after-covid-19/>.

food packs. Php583.8 Billion was allocated for the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) and Small Business Wage Subsidy (SBWS) programs. On top of this, a Php595.6 Billion, from the COVID-19 war chest was allocated for emergency support for vulnerable sectors such as the poor, low-wage workers, the informal sector, and others.<sup>46</sup> These social protection and emergency support policies were supposedly for the most vulnerable, why does it seem then, that the poor's concerns are not met?

If the government truly listened to the plight of the poor, there would be policies in place to protect both the health and financial status of the people - wherein the poor would not be left oppressed, immobile or without a choice. Budget allocations of billions are not enough if directives are not in solidarity with the poor, or if the poor's actual experiences are not taken into consideration.

### **#PoorLivesMatter**

Using the lens of hooks, how can we understand class matters in the Philippines amidst the pandemic? How do we intervene in class warfare? Hooks argues that the only way class oppression can be fought is to break the silence about class.<sup>47</sup> However, this cannot be done if few are aware about class hierarchies. In the US, more and more citizens are becoming aware of the #BlackLivesMatter movement's thrust, which is to expose the systemic racism suffered by Black people. In the Philippines, although systems try to provide for the poor through subsidies, and health and safety coverages, it sadly ends there. The same systems which are supposed to help the poor weather the pandemic, such as the Inter-Agency Task Force on Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF), Philippine Health System (Philhealth), the Philippine National Police (PNP), the Local Government Units

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<sup>46</sup> Jose Ramon G Albert et al., "Poverty, the Middle Class, and Income Distribution amid COVID-19," Discussion Paper Series 2020-2022, September 2020.

<sup>47</sup> bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (Psychology Press, 2000), pp. 8-10.

(LGUs), the Department of the Interior and Local Government, the barangays, and others, are the same systems which seem to be anti-poor.

We should point out the flaws of these government systems and recognize how certain actions such as silencing the poor's voices by arresting protesters, giving special benefits to the elite, red tape in availing welfare/benefits/healthcare, additional and costly but unnecessary safety requirements, and widespread corruption and stealing from emergency funds reinforce class distinctions and the suffering of certain classes.

Furthermore, we must push for the redistribution of wealth. While hooks specifies welfare programs, these should not only be government-based but rather communal as well. This type of organizing is dependent not only on authorities but rather a change in the mindset of all classes. Class consciousness plays a role in such movements, in particular, the awareness of other-class experiences. This in turn also pushes for a collective critique of capitalist (and even government) greed.

One of the obstacles to such consciousness is the existence of fear and dread. As we see, the fear of the middle class is the fear of losing their resources to the poor, as explained by hooks. Such uprisings of the middle class during the COVID-19 outbreak reflect the realities that while the poor are unemployed, the middle classes are also on the verge of losing their jobs (or already have lost their jobs)!

As "this is not a class-free society", hooks reminds us that "it is in our interest to face the issue of class, to become more conscious, to know better".<sup>48</sup> We must begin with the point of view and experiences of the lower classes, the working and unemployed classes, realize that we have systems that are anti-poor, and systems that reinforce the clash of classes. The theoretical framework of anti-blackness reveals racial disparities magnified by COVID-19, which was embedded in the history of racist oppression in the US. Similarly, in the Philippines, COVID-

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<sup>48</sup> bell hooks, *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (Psychology Press, 2000), p. 6.

19 has magnified the discrimination of the poor because of the fear of losing resources and being poor.

The tipping point of the #BlackLivesMatter movement is part of the function of the acknowledgement of anti-blackness. When people realized that the US is not an ideal place for colored people, and when they considered the correlation of Blackness with other oppressive factors such as class and gender, COVID-19 magnified the need for a revolt against the incumbent administration. While the fight is still being continued in the US, only with the acknowledgement of the plight of the poor in the Philippines, and a critique of anti-poorness, can we cross-over to more just economic systems or a more communal approach.

Community quarantine rules should be continuously interrogated in relation to their effects on various classes. While capitalists supposedly resumed their businesses to heal the bleeding Philippine economy, what do they do to make sure that their less fortunate employees are protected from the virus? Considering the fact that the government policies have already been branded as exclusivist and "anti-poor, anti-people, anti-worker, anti-public transportation, and anti-commuter,"<sup>49</sup> how can we "best struggle for economic justice"<sup>50</sup> when the poor have been criminalized for violating protocols, "quashing their legitimate pleas for food and economic aid"?<sup>51</sup> Speaking up about class matters are vital at this point. Some have called for politicians to step out of their luxury cars and endure two hour walks, and some have outrightly called out certain privileges afforded to the rich through various media and socially-distanced assemblies.

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<sup>49</sup> Aika Rey, "1st Day of Metro Manila GCQ: 'Walang Masakyan,'" Rappler, accessed June 9, 2020, <http://www.rappler.com/nation/262589-first-day-gcq-metro-manila-no-public-transportation-june-1-2020>.

<sup>50</sup> hooks, *Where We Stand*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Ana Santos, "Poverty Punished as Philippines Gets Tough in Virus Pandemic," 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/poverty-punished-philippines-tough-virus-pandemic-200413063921536.html>.

The issue of class must first be acknowledged before the world could unite together to overcome patriarchal and other marginalizing systems. It has been twenty years since bell hooks wrote her book on class matters. Her theories matter to this day, especially in the times of COVID-19 when every possible form of oppression is apparent all over the world. While it seems that hooks' proposals to end class warfare are too simplistic with the revision of welfare programs and resource-sharing, these are the hardest to do. This entails a complete revamp of economic allocations and a change in mindsets about class which have been deeply embedded in the Filipino psyche. Furthermore, welfare should be understood thoroughly and not be merely reduced to just cash dole-outs but rather holistic programs that address the well-being of the poor.

In a move towards political solidarity, it is imperative to be in touch and value class differences and complexities.<sup>52</sup> We can overcome societal conflicts, be they race, gender or class-related, if we are in touch with realities and if we challenge obvious motivations. With the Philippine economy expected to decline further as the pandemic lingers, we must “not allow COVID-19 to devastate the poor”.<sup>53</sup> While being Black in the US is dangerous, being poor in the Philippines is to be neglected and reduced to *nothing*. As such, we should be reminded that in the Philippines, and everywhere else in the world, in times of the COVID-19 pandemic, #PoorLivesMatter, too.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> hooks, *Outlaw Culture*, p. 110.

<sup>53</sup> “Let’s Not Allow Covid-19 to Devastate the Poor,” BusinessMirror, April 2, 2020, <https://businessmirror.com.ph/2020/04/02/lets-not-allow-covid-19-to-devastate-the-poor/>.

<sup>54</sup> Will Shetterly wrote about “Why #BlackLivesMatter should be #PoorLivesMatter”. He claims that “police killings are racially proportionate to American poverty”. There have also been discussions as to why Americans prefer the hashtag #AllLivesMatter since poverty affects everyone be they Black or White. In the case of the Philippines, however, racism is not an immediate or pressing issue, poverty however is a huge problem.

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