Kinsa Pa Man Diay?: Neoliberalism and Anti-Politics at Work in Three Cebuano Songs Released during Community Quarantine

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Abstract: The succinct and repetitive qualities of verse give it an edge of catchiness over most forms of prose, and with this a greater staying power in the minds of an audience. Such catchiness becomes even more pronounced when the verse is paired with a musical melody, thus taking the form of lyrics. While much has been said of how music can prove effective in conveying counter-cultural messages and empowering marginalized voices, thereby affirming its inherently political nature, little attention has been paid to how this same medium may also be utilized to distract listeners from key issues or reinforce certain detrimental, hegemonic discourses and ideologies.

In this paper, I explicate how the lyrics of three Cebuano songs released over the course of the 2020 community quarantine—*"Wa'y 'Blema* (ECQ Version)" ("No Problem") by the Wonggoys; *"Dungan"* ("Together"), performed by various artists and produced by the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc. in collaboration with Kadasig; and *"Kinsa Pa Man Diay?"* ("Who Else but Us?"), sung also by various artists and released by the Cebu Citizens Initiative—not only raise awareness on COVID-19 precautions, but also, in emphasizing values like obedience, discipline, and individual responsibility, further propound neoliberal and anti-political thought onto their listeners.

Keywords: Neoliberalism, Anti-politics, Cebuano, Music, Pandemic

Introduction: Neoliberalism and Anti-Politics

One of the more famous quotes attributed to British prime minister Margaret Thatcher, stated during an interview she gave with *Woman's Own* magazine in 1987, goes like this: "There is no such thing [as society]! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first" (Keay, 1987). Earlier in the decade, and barely two years after she ascended to the aforementioned office in May 1979, a newly elected world leader across the pond uttered words of a similar tenor during his inaugural address on January 20th, 1981. President Ronald Reagan's words would go on to become a credo of sorts among fiscally conservative circles for decades to come: "Government is not the solution to our problem, government is the problem" (Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, 1981). Said statements roughly coincided with the opening-up of China's economy under Deng Xiaoping ("socialism with Chinese characteristics," the paramount leader famously dubbed this transition) and precipitated the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.

These developments—besides heralding a so-called "end of history," according to political scientist Francis Fukuyama (1989), defined by the "unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism"—may seem rather distant, both geographically and temporally, even innocuous, from the perspective of a twenty-first-century Cebuano, but they have much bearing on the way we think and behave today. Scholars such as David Harvey (2005) point to the early years of the Thatcher and Reagan administrations as the first wave of neoliberalism, a specific type of capitalism that essentially eroded the dominance of post–World War II Keynesian economics. This diminishing of government's role in the lives of ordinary citizens, if

not the alteration of its raison d'être to suit the needs of capital, was founded on theories first articulated by noted economists like Milton Friedman, Friedrich von Hayek, and the Chicago School of Economics, and soon translated into a number of policies that included the lowering of tariffs to encourage free trade, the reduction of corporate taxes couched in the idea that wealth generated from above would eventually "trickle down," and the introduction of austerity measures that went hand in hand with the privatization of state services.

In the case of the Philippines, which didn't have quite the robust welfare infrastructure that the more industrialized West did, the fall of the Marcos dictatorship at around this time left the ground ripe for the entrenchment of neoliberal policies. Walden Bello (2009) cites three factors that led to this "triumph by default": (1) intellectuals and technocrats consulted by the Aquino administration were greatly influenced by Reaganist and Thatcherite free-market experiments already underway in the United States and the United Kingdom; (2) the not-entirely-erroneous pinning of economic troubles on Marcos's crony capitalism, through which he bequeathed state agencies to associates in the private sector; and (3) the compromising of Keynesian developmentalism, with its heavy emphasis on state intervention in market processes, by its "personification" in the Marcos dictatorship.

As Arnisson Andre Ortega (2018) writes, by attributing and blaming economic stagnation and all other woes—which included "corruption, strong state control, and authoritarianism"—on Marcos, the Aquino administration was able to effectively rationalize the institution of neoliberal reforms and justify "the rise of a regime of truth conflating democracy and freedom with free-market capitalism and global competitiveness."

So how exactly do these macro-scale policies manifest at the individual level? For one, Ortega has observed a "cultural shift" in the Philippine milieu that valorizes values such as entrepreneurialism and competitiveness. Such valorization is "contingently an othering process, one that vilifies the unwarranted and expendable bodies of surplus populations." In other words, there is a tendency among many in the privileged middle and upper classes to make blanket political, economic, and even psychological statements with regard to complex issues like poverty alleviation and even, as we've seen in the past year, pandemic protocols. Pronouncements that state to the effect the importance of "working hard" (most characteristically exemplified by the "pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps" mentality) and "staying home" without taking into consideration multiple variables and the difficult realities of the aforementioned surplus populations are proof of this.[1] Any appeals to unity from these upper classes, then, however well-intentioned, will ultimately prove exclusionary when hemmed within the framework of neoliberalism.

Corollary to neoliberal thought, and a good part of why bourgeois individualism has proven so successfully pervasive in the "post-consensus" era, is what Noam Chomsky (2012) refers to as anti-politics. In its pinning of blame for societal failures solely on government—and not, say, corporate influence, which is often less visible—anti-politics champions hyperindividualistic values, chief of these being the notion that the individual is exempt from or not affected by social realities. Participation in political processes is thus immaterial, and the individual deems him/herself the master of their own destiny. Capitalist-underpinned constructs of "success," which tend to preoccupy the thoughts of anti-political individuals, are thus believed to be achievable by sheer grit and hard work, irrespective of the circumstances one is born into. The normalization of anti-politics is well in evidence in casual statements by friends or personalities who opt "not to get political," whether in everyday conversations or on their social media profiles, or when we hear acquaintances justify, though not wholly inaccurately, their deliberate decision not to vote with the "all politicians are the same anyway" argument.

While playing to our egos and convenience,[2] hyperindividualist anti-politics simultaneously works to the benefit of corporate interests and their enablers in a government that presides over what Harvey refers to as "the neoliberal state." By playing up "the self" in relation to one's society, private corporations and neoliberal regimes have hindered many from looking past their individual privileges, or dissuaded mass organizations in general—effectively "atomizing" society while powerful sectors further consolidate their dominance.

Chomsky's discussions are made mainly within the context of the United States, but it should come as no surprise—given that country's penchant for exporting depoliticized thought and individual

exceptionalism—to see an aversion to politics, and a consequent susceptibility to right-wing rhetoric, manifest in the Philippines in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, albeit with a distinctly Filipino air. Whereas a potent "Don't Tread on Me" ethos in America's culture has translated into staunch resistance against mask-wearing, here in the Philippines, and especially in Cebu, the skyrocketing case counts were attributed by many officials and Duterte supporters to a perceived lack of discipline on the part of individual citizens who, for example, refused to stay home or wear their face masks or shields properly. Hence, when President Rodrigo Duterte, in a June 22 press conference, called out Cebuanos for being *"gahi'g ulo"* (hard-headed), essentially blaming the public and not slow, inept government measures and misplaced priorities for furthering the virus's spread, a number of Cebuanos—no doubt supporters of his but also unknowingly indoctrinated by a minimalist government mind-set[3]—still very much agreed with him.

The COVID-19 Pandemic in Cebu

Ask any Cebuano who regularly listens to the radio what they know of Asian College of Technology or Mandani Bay, and they'll likely tell you how the former institute "creates the future today" while the latter residential development can, for some unarticulated reason, assist one in "[following their] heart, [following their] dreams, and [living their] passion every day." The pervasiveness of these radio ads in our airwaves and, say, campaign jingles bursting from loudspeakers during election season to drill a candidate's name into the minds of prospective voters, speaks to the catchy vibe that words can take on when paired with a musical melody. As Michael Ryan and Brett Ingram (2010) put it, "There is purpose and design behind the music we hear in offices, in stores, on commercials, and at social gatherings," among other settings. In the case of radio ads and campaign jingles, music doesn't just serve the purpose of promoting the establishment or the candidate involved, but also primarily informing the listener of the subject's existence.

This need for information dissemination has become all the more crucial in the past year, as the world descended into pandemic pandemonium, and government and health officials scrambled to raise awareness among their respective populations of the precautions they needed to take (hand-washing, social distancing, refraining from touching one's face being chief examples), as well as dispel certain myths and conspiracy theories about the virus that were making the rounds online. In Cebu, identified by the University of the Philippines's OCTA research group as the country's "second major battleground" in the fight against COVID-19 (qtd. in Macasero, 2020a), on account of the rising cases from May to July 2020, officials sought to curb the spread by implementing measures that mirrored those in other parts of the country: strict border controls, curfews and liquor bans, the introduction of a quarantine pass system, to name some of the more notable ones. Case numbers remained high for several weeks, however, prompting President Duterte to not just revert the status of the province from General Community Quarantine (GQC) to the more stringent Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ), but also deploy several police and military personnel from other provinces to enforce lockdown measures, with retired general Roy Cimatu overseeing the pandemic response in the provincial capital (Macasero, 2020b).

Perhaps one of the more distinctly Cebuano means by which officials and organizations sought to remind the public of the severity of the virus and the importance of adhering to regulations was the uploading onto the internet of music videos with pandemic-inspired lyrics. As the birthplace of the VisPop phenomenon and the home of various musical artists, Cebu already had the infrastructure and personnel in place to convey COVID-related information by way of music. Between May and August 2020, I came across on social media three music videos tailored for this purpose: *"Wa'y 'Blema* (ECQ Version)" ("No Problem") by the Wonggoys, a lyrically modified version of their 2018 song of the same name; *"Dungan"* ("Together"), sung by various artists and produced by the Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc., in collaboration with independent record label Kadasig; and *"Kinsa Pa Man Diay?"* ("Who Else but Us?"), performed also by various artists and released by the Cebu Citizens Initiative.

Musical artists mobilizing, or being called on to mobilize, in the wake or in the midst of a crisis is nothing new. Oftentimes, their performative talents are employed to raise funds, as in the case of benefit and charity concerts. More seldom, although far from rarely, they are commissioned to pen lyrics specifically inspired by the crisis at hand, as in the case of the three abovementioned songs. Explicating

lyrics, to quote Ryan and Ingram (2010) again, is "such a strange endeavor" because it is often difficult to separate lyrics from the context in which they are produced. Music, as with all other forms of art, has a "mutually determined and determining" relationship with the political sphere; both greatly influence each other, however disparate they may seem.

Thus, if not examined critically, music—particularly lyrics—can have that "reactionary purpose" of concealing from the members of the society in which it is produced and created for, the true facts of their social condition (Witkin, 2003), perhaps not unlike how the brash pronouncements of a certain president can go unquestioned by his most ardent fans. In contrast to deliberately politically charged statements, however, music takes on an air of harmlessness because it is crafted carefully, artfully, with the creative well aware of what clicks with or appeals to an audience that has little to no time to formulate their own in-depth analyses.

In his essay "Musica Moralia," Resil Mojares (2019) writes, paralleling Ryan and Ingram's assertions, that "music and politics cannot be dissociated." In concluding this write-up, the Cebuano scholar poses some thought-provoking questions on the relationship between the art form and contemporaneous sociopolitical events; these include "Is musical nationalism [or more broadly, any musical piece that calls for a vague sense of solidarity] a self-evident good even when it is produced under the patronage of an occupation government and local dictatorship?" and "Does music create the private space in which one can preserve one's autonomy and keep one's freedom, or does it nourish a quietist acceptance of things as they are?"

Although the three songs under analysis were admittedly well composed and produced, with their respective music videos receiving their fair share of viewers and reactors, my initial reaction upon listening to each was one of disappointment, perhaps even frustration, for I could not help but notice how these lyrics tended to omit key antecedents and other concurrent developments that led to the pandemic's reaching the grievous point that it did in our country and in my home province. I thus listened to these songs repeatedly, transcribed their lyrics, and highlighted certain lines that I felt parroted or operated within the parameters set by the government's rhetoric, and by extension propounded values that a neoliberal-state authority would find favorable. I also consulted a couple of readings on music's role in society, and how notions of individualism and an avoidance of politics overlap, becoming especially entrenched in recent decades. I then used these readings as a lens directed at these song lyrics to articulate my points, with the hope of answering, in some capacity, the queries posed by Mojares.

Explicating Lyrics

An initial listen and cursory lyric read of both *"Wa'y 'Blema* (ECQ Version)," which I shall hereon refer to as S1, and *"Dungan,"* S2 moving forward, will readily reveal the "information dissemination" function of both songs, in particular by way of dispelling "the myths and misguided beliefs about the virus" and "spread[ing] the word about proper anti-COVID practices," to quote from S1's YouTube description (2020). This is because both S1 and S2 were released just seven days apart in May of 2020, relatively early during community quarantine, as the public had to hurriedly acclimate to the so-called "new normal," but at the same time encountered some difficulty distinguishing truths from lies amid the information they received primarily from social media.

S1's second stanza, for example, has a line that addresses misconceptions about the demographics which the virus purportedly "only" affects: the wealthy—presumably because COVID-19 at the time was typically associated with air travel, a luxury available mainly to the country's middle and upper classes and far removed from the experiences of those residing in urban slums—and the elderly *("Idol, dili na tinuod nga sakit na sa dato ug sa gor ra matakod"* [Idol, it's not true that this virus infects only the wealthy, and that only old people can catch it[4]] [Wonggoys, 2020]). There are also lines that address the rumor that the virus is comparable to a regular flu *("Dili ra ni hilanat, dili grabe nga ubo"* [It's not just a fever, nor a terrible cough]), as well as pointing out that even if one does not feel symptoms, there is still the need to maintain physical distancing *("Ug kon wa pod kay gibati,* need *gihapon kang magpalayo"* [And if you're not feeling anything, you still need to keep distance]).

More dispelling is seen in the stanza following the first chorus regarding rumored "treatments,"

such as the ingesting of alcohol *("Kay ang* alcohol *sa* beer *di kapatay / Anang* virus *kon mosud sa imong lawas"* [Because alcohol from beer cannot kill the virus once it's inside your body]), the taking of vitamins *("Bisan pag mag* vitamins"), exposing oneself to sunlight *("Magpabuwad pa sa init"),* and even gargling salt *("Mogargle pa ka og asin").*

A dispelling of similar myths can be seen in the rapped portion of S2, with the notable addition of warning listeners from buying into "false rumors" *("tuo-tuo")*:

Sakit ra daw sa dato, di sa pobre ilang ingon
[It's an illness only of the rich, not the poor, they say]
Di motakod kay sa daghang kagaw na daw sila immune
[It's not contagious because they're immune to many germs]
*Nya okay na daw ka basta mag-*gargle *lag asin*
[And it's okay if you just gargle salt, they say]
Bisag magporgag vitamins, Corona *walay* vaccine
[Even if you ingest vitamins, Corona has no vaccine]
Mabata o tiguwang, way gipili ning sakita
[Young or old, this illness doesn't choose]
Nyag matakdan ka, matakdan pod nimo imong pamilya
[And if you catch it, your family will be infected too]
Mao nang ay'g pailad, ay'g padas mga tuo-tuo
[So don't be fooled, don't believe the false rumors]
Dako pag chance *maayo sa* COVID, *kaysa pagka uto-uto*
[You'll recover from COVID faster than from all the foolery]
(Ramon Aboitiz Foundation, Inc., 2020)

Apart from myth-busting, there is also the expected reminder of precautions in both songs that citizens ought to practice. S1 starts with emphasizing the "strictness" of quarantine, the importance of staying home, as well as reminding listeners via backing vocals (in parentheses below) of the community quarantine status of Cebu at the time of the song's release:

Batok sa COVID, strikto na ang quarantine
[In our fight against COVID, quarantine is now strict]
Dili na pwede magsige og gawas sa house
[We can't just leave the

house anytime
anymore]
(Aah!
ECQ!)
It's a
beautiful life
kung magpuyo
lang sa ta
[It's a
beautiful life if
we just stay put]
(Aah!
ECQ!)

This modifying of lyrics to an already popular song boosts S1's influential appeal. By simply recalling the catchy melody, listeners need only to replace the lyrics from the original track with this new set, and are hence readily reminded of the myths and precautions for which this song was penned to address and air, respectively.

In S2, a similar reminding rhetoric can be seen concerning social distancing and how this can be understood as an act of love *("Distansiya, higala / Kay distance* is love"), as well as staying home *("Pagpuyo nalang sa balay")* and avoiding public gatherings *("Sa mga tapok paglikay")* and other risky scenarios *("Magpalayo ta sa mga panulay").* Expectedly, there is also the reminder to observe precautions such as frequent hand-washing *("Paghunaw og kamot")* and refraining from touching one's face *("Ang nawong ay'g hikapa").* In contrast to S1, though, S2 must rely on the repetition of key phrases as it is an entirely new song.

Beyond these well-meaning statements, however, the messaging behind certain lines in both lyrics, as well as the third song, *"Kinsa Pa Man Diay?"* (S3), which was released in August and therefore tackles different though not unrelated concerns, is suggestive of neoliberal, and extensively, anti-political thinking. Such a supposition becomes even more cogent when one takes into consideration certain much-publicized events that preceded the songs' releases, but which were undoubtedly concurrent with their production.

As early as March 2020, for example, when lockdown measures began to be enforced, medical experts and progressive groups were already calling for the implementation of a mass testing program, in line with the World Health Organization's recommendations to "test, test, test" (Farge & Revill, 2020). Proof of this was the trending of the hashtag #MassTestingNowPH across various social media platforms. Instead of following through, however, the Philippine government—which was already months behind in its pandemic response, given the lax attitude officials displayed in January and February—instated draconian measures that included the sudden closing of borders between cities and provinces, the deployment of police and military personnel to man checkpoints, and the mass arrests of dozens of supposed "quarantine violators," mainly in poorer neighborhoods. and most infamously, President Duterte's orders to law enforcers to "shoot…dead" anyone they saw as violating protocols (Tomacruz, 2020). Such a response prompted both local critics and international observers to label the Duterte government's response as less medical and more militaristic (see report by Reyes, 2020).

Obedience, ostensibly with regard to observing quarantine regulations (however absurd or inhumane a number of these were), was a buzz word thrown around by officials and supporters of the administration. Anyone apprehended for an alleged violation was immediately seen as "disobedient" without taking into account the circumstances behind their arrest and detaining. Characteristic of the neoliberal state, this labeling effectively shifted the blame of the virus's spread onto the individual, even though a number of these "violators" were likely just out to procure supplies or unjustly detained by emboldened law enforcement. At the same time, this also permitted the government to ascribe the terms *"reklamador"* (complainant) to critics and *"pasaway"* (disobedient, rowdy folks) to supposed violators, thereby generating a binary narrative—not unlike what they did with the war on drugs—where anyone who complained or did not cooperate was aggravating the pandemic situation, while those who complied constituted the "good citizenry."

Sadly, in all three songs, there is not a single call for mass testing, nor is there, at the very least, a questioning of the myriad controversial ways regulations were enforced. One can thus read this as an avoidance, on the part of the artists or composers, of highly charged political issues—specifically those which relate to criticisms leveled at the government. There is, unfortunately, an extolling of obedience echoed in their lyrics. In the chorus of S1, for example, the lyrics mention how there is "no need to

worry" *("Ay'g kabalaka")* if we simply follow the rules *("mopatuo lang ta")* and just stay home *("Kung magpuyo lang sa gyud ta / Wa'y 'blema").* Also, the phrase "a beautiful life" (taken from the original lyrics) is linked with staying put and therefore complying and not exacerbating the situation, as illustrated by the following sequence:

> It's a
> beautiful life
> *kung magpuyo*
> *lang sa ta*
> [It's a
> beautiful life if
> we just stay put]
> (Aah!
> ECQ!)
> *Ang*
> *tanang problema*
> *di na nato pun-*
> *an pa*
> [Let's not
> add to all these
> problems].

In the succeeding line, "It's a beautiful life *kung di ta magpada"* [It's a beautiful life if we don't let ourselves get carried away]," the use of the term *magpada*—short for *magpadala,* meaning to allow oneself to get carried away emotionally—reads quite ambiguous in the given context, although considering it is followed by another instance of "*Ang tanang problema di na nato pun-an pa,"* one can surmise that the emotion the song is trying to warn its listeners against is anger or at the very least discontent, both associated with the *"reklamador"* critics of the administration.

Obedience is stressed even more, albeit with fewer lines, in S2, where the phrase *"Patuo sa mando sa mga nagdumala"* (Obey the mandate of those who govern) is repeated twice within the song. The subsequent lines then convey a similar message:

> *Kay ang*
> *virus di makita,*
> *Di masumpo kon*
> *di magpatuo*
> [Because
> the virus cannot
> be seen, it
> cannot be fought
> if we don't obey]
>
> *Ang*
> *pagtuman sa*
> *balaod nga*
> *gimando sa*
> *gobyerno*
> [Following
> the law that the
> government
> mandates]

Notions of discipline tie closely with obedience. The neoliberal state's success and continued existence are greatly contingent on the submissiveness of the citizenry, their "quietist acceptance" of things as they are, given that alternate currents of thought will likely interrogate the inhumane, profit-driven system of the dominating corporatist order. It should come as no surprise, then, that a line in S2 posits that the solution to this crisis *("Masulbad ra ning problemaha")* lies in the widespread practicing of discipline by the public *("Kon naa lang tay disiplina").* Similarly, the constant, forceful repetition of the line *"Ay'g kumpyansa, bai, kon di ka gusto mamatay"* (Don't risk it, friend, if you don't want to die) in the same song conflates notions of "risk-taking" (that is, going out) with not adhering to quarantine protocols, which, according to the song's logic, results in death.

Because the role of the government in a neoliberal state is reduced to merely preserving the institutional framework that aids and abets the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms (Harvey, 2005), instead of providing quality state services in the areas of health care, education, and housing, for example, the responsibility of addressing large-scale concerns is ultimately passed on to the individual citizen, who is, only when convenient for the powers that be, lumped together with a vague public. The opening stanza of *"Dungan,"* where the titular word appears, is illustrative of this, proclaiming how "we stand together" *("Dungan tag barog"),* "we rise together" *("Dungan tag saka")* "amid the trials" *("Sa mga pagsulay"),* but a hint of disobedience or lack of discipline on the part of citizens *("Kon magpabadlong")*—and not, say, poor government investment in health services—will imminently lead to everyone dying *("Aw, dungan ta matay").*

S3, released on the first of August and thus likely produced at the height of the COVID-19 situation in Cebu, when MECQ was reinstated by

Duterte after some weeks of GCQ, is a song that "calls for unity and solidarity" among Cebuanos in riding out the health and economic crisis brought about by the pandemic, and serves as an anthem of sorts encouraging Cebu to "rise back to progress."[5] However, it is, I would argue, the most egregious among the three when it comes to propounding neoliberal values.

As early as the opening verse, the word "negligent" (the composers' official translation of *"pasagdan")* comes up in relation to "us," *"Unta di na nato ni pasagdan"* (We hope we won't be negligent this time) (Cebu Citizens Initiative, 2020), as if the virus's spread was the fault of a "disobedient" citizenry rather than a national government that proved slow in its response earlier in the year, and sidelined medical experts in favor of retired generals. This is immediately followed by lines that hint at the importance of obedience and unity, in a period of community quarantine marked by a growing frustration among Cebuanos:

Walay di masulbad kung tanan
[There's nothing we can't solve]
Magkahiusa lang
[If we all come as one]
Sa pagpakabana
[In showing that we care]
Alang sa usa'g usa…
[For each other…]

The chorus of this song also embodies a shifting of responsibility, with its pointing to "we" the public as our "only salvation": *"Kita ra gyud ang atong kaluwasan."* It also presents questions as to who will help us, carry us, and remain steadfast for us amid this crisis…

Kinsa pa man diay ang magtinabangay?
[Who else will help us?]
Kinsa pa man diay ang mag-inunongay?
[Who will be steadfast?]
Kinsa pa man diay ang magdayong?
[Who else will carry us?]

…before concluding that only we *("kita")* can do these ourselves: *"Kita ra gihapon, bai"* (If not each other, my friend). There is, I would like to point out, an ironic truth to this line, as the relative absence of government or its largely haphazard response in a crisis, inevitably necessitates a reliance among individuals on each other, without much-needed governmental aid.

A notable feature of this song, in keeping with its calls for "unity and solidarity" is its emphasis on the economy—something absent in the two previous songs, which were more concerned with conveying information and quelling disinformation. After months of restricted movement and shuttered establishments, the economy was beginning to strain, and local government units were running out of funds to handle relief efforts. (Meanwhile, the national government around this time was focusing on other priorities, such as passing the highly contentious Anti-Terror Law, making moves aimed at shutting down the country's leading broadcasting network, and applying for more loans from abroad that didn't seem to amount to much.) In the following stanza, citizens are called on *("giawhag")* to reclaim lost livelihoods and resume the progress of Cebu City. This is despite the fact that the national government had not provided even the least bit assurance that they had capitalized on the stricter measures enforced months prior and had gotten the virus under control in the same way that other countries (such as Vietnam, which had already reopened by this point) had done:

Bawion tang panginabuhi nga napagan
[Let's reclaim our livelihoods that

were bogged down]

Balikon ta ang kanhing natagmtaman nga kauswagan

[Let's resume the former progress enjoyed]

Ning atong dakbayan

[By our city]

Maong giawhag ang tanan

[Which is why we call on everyone]

The government's negligence and less-than-scientific approach ultimately put its most vulnerable citizens in a position where they *had* to report back to their jobs or resume with their livelihoods after at least two months of no income, thereby putting themselves and their families at risk.

By the second half of 2020, the government appeared to change its tune—from mandating stay-at-home orders to encouraging people to go back to working, spending, and consuming for the sake of kick-starting a declining economy.[6] This gambling of people's lives in the service of capital has since become a matter of policy choice in the face of a resurgence of cases in the first quarter of 2021, as government officials, particularly in Cebu, repeatedly thumbed down calls from medical experts to reinstate stricter measures, as the economy will only "suffer" as a result (see report by Lorenciana, 2021).

By invoking "the former progress we enjoyed," S3 is essentially eliciting a nostalgia for a pre-pandemic era defined by a narrow, market-centric, capital-driven view of progress and development—one which Cebu, being one of the wealthier cities in the country, supposedly enjoyed. Such progress can only be revived if said market and the practices that undergirded it, however unsustainable and unjust, are resuscitated as well. This thus gives voice to the network of solely economic relationships that, according to neoliberal political philosophy, binds all human relations.

Conclusion: The Role of Capital beyond the Lyrics

In his 2013 book, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital,* political scientist Vivek Chibber places a particular import on looking into capital's role in examining and explaining various phenomena, in an age where capitalist tendencies have spread all across the globe as to become "universalized." While he admits that such an approach runs the risk of pigeonholing all forms of analysis into "economic reductionism," applying this view to the three song lyrics under study would not in any way deviate from Mojares's and Ryan and Ingram's assertions that music must not be studied in isolation.

In the preceding section, I illustrated how the three examined song lyrics not only echoed regime rhetoric with their stressing of obedience and discipline, but also propounded the neoliberal corollary values of individual responsibility and political apathy. I would like to conclude this essay with a personal supposition that may also very well serve as a recommendation for future study—one that somewhat goes beyond the lyrics, as well as my scholarship in the field of literature and cultural studies.

One especially striking element of S1's music video is that it ends with the following caption: "Thank you to the angel donor who funded the production of this version." More alarming is the inclusion of the statement "Let's all heal as one" in S2's lyrics, which is obviously a blatant nod to the Duterte administration's slogan in its pandemic efforts, one that insidiously discourages any form of dissent or complaint, not just with regard to quarantine protocols but government policy in general. That S3 also lends an emphasis to the economy and the "progress" associated with Cebu, despite poor efforts by the government in ensuring the safety and well-being of workers and the larger citizenry, hints at the significant involvement of capital forces.

Perhaps, then, a potential research springing off this one could look into the funding or patronage of these songs' productions, and investigate the politics—or absence thereof—of the institutions and personalities involved. The preliminaries, however, which I've sketched out here, appear far from encouraging. Broadly speaking, they suggest that

right-wing proclivities for an obedience to authority and a preference for individual responsibility are well-ingrained in the "common sense" processes of Cebuano musical creatives so as to be worked into song compositions and performed for a wide audience on social media. More troublingly, they are indicative of how neoliberal philosophy and anti-politics have prevailed in the Cebuano milieu, going unquestioned even in the realm where critical thought and subversion ought to have the greatest potential: the arts. Indeed, ideology is most effective when it is invisible.

Notes

1. In a July 2020 online conference organized by the University of San Carlos Museum, titled "Gahi'g Ulo: Deciphering Cebuano Culture and Society amid the Global Pandemic," sociologist and USC professor Dr. Zona Amper explains how the concept of "home" in the context of informal settlements or urban slum areas is "not restricted to a house, but extended to the common spaces within the community due to limited spaces within their houses." She also adds that "stay-at-home" orders for these residents meant not being able to work, and thus not being able to provide for their daily needs.
2. Journalist Carlos Maza (2020) argues that a good part of why anti-politics makes for such effective propaganda is because it latches on to many stories we subscribe to about what power dynamics are supposed to look like; i.e., "the lone badass standing up against the evil empire," as seen in big-budget Hollywood franchises like Star Wars, Harry Potter, and the Hunger Games.
3. A popular pro-Duterte meme that continues to circulate on Facebook amid the pandemic reads, "No matter how much you hate the government, do not wish for its failure. When it fails, *we die,* or *one of our loved ones dies.* We're on one boat. If you want a better Philippines, stop acting like you are better than the president. Stop complaining and be a better Filipino." From the profile of Katarina Faune, shared on 17 September 2020.
4. English translations for the lyrics of both *"Wa'y 'Blema* (ECQ Version)" and *"Dungan"* were provided by the author of this paper, with corrections suggested by Dr. Erlinda Alburo. For *"Kinsa Pa Man Diay?"* translations were already made available in the music video.
5. From the music video's caption, found on the Facebook page of the Cebu Citizens Initiative.
6. The Department of Tourism's Ingat Angat campaign, launched in October, was a clear example of this.

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