Mapping the Folklores of a Disrupted Everyday: Countermapping the Pandemic Life

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Taking notes from Denis Wood's A Narrative Atlas of Boylan Heights (2008) and John Eyles' The Geography of Everyday Life (1989), this paper would highlight the "talking maps" of certain parts of Metro Manila, relative to the perspective of the author whose frequent encounters with the mapped places are central. This work shall present my three personal cartographies: (1) Marthopper, showing my routes towards nearby shops during the height of tight restrictions brought by pandemic-related lockdowns, (2) Choking Bottlenecks, a map showing a commuter's perspective of traffic conditions in his primary thoroughfare, Commonwealth Avenue and (3) Hues of Green, a map showing the available greenspaces in Metro Manila concerning limited outdoor activities to such spaces. I intend to highlight the significance of my cartographies in understanding the new everyday life I had to deal with due to the pandemic restrictions. While narrative maps of places with major conflicts and/or other events of global interest may be easy to come by, cartographies that represent the daily life of a middle-class young adult, especially in the context of Philippine urbanity aren't that many. Done in a contemporary, unconventional style, these maps tell the story of my everyday, lived experiences during the pandemic.

Keywords: *counter maps, everyday life, folklore, pandemic life, urban living*

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This paper intends to present my take on countermapping by showcasing familiar spaces through radical maps. Pegging on Denis Wood's Boylan Heights, this narrative atlas will feature three counter maps of personally significant spaces during the height of the pandemic: highlighting my perspective of these spaces vis-a-vis my experiences during the first few months of COVID-related restrictions. The first map, titled *Marthoppe*r, is where I visualized the supermarkets in our vicinity and the routes I took to get there concerning my role as the family's sole shopper when restrictions only allowed for an individual per household to do outside errands. The second map called *Choking Points* depicts Commonwealth Avenue, a significant thoroughfare in the middle of a highly dense cluster of residential areas of Quezon City from my view as a regular commuter. Aptly titled as such, this map acted as a graphic outlet of my frustration in occasions of traffic jams and influx of fellow commuters during rush hours. Lastly, the third map *Hues of Green* is a manifestation of my need for green spaces when the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF) only allowed the conduct of social gatherings and activities in such places. The map bears such a name for I categorized green open spaces in Metro Manila based on their respective intended uses. Interweaving George Eyles' Geography of Everyday, this narrative atlas will also make sense of the "everyday " in the context of the realities I encountered on a daily basis, which were covered upon the creation of the maps. Using his parameters of "understanding the everyday," the motivations behind the creation of the map will be explored juxtaposed to the social forces that conjured me and my awareness to take notice of what has been usually regarded as the "mundane."

The Everyday Life

The inquiry into everyday life has always been present in the academe primarily through the phenomenological approach in research. Acting as both a research approach and a philosophical movement, it put a premium on the closer study of the appearance of experiences from a first-person point of view by understanding a plethora of factors related to consciousness such as sensory encounters, social conditions, and levels of awareness. First appearing as a form of inquiry during the first half of the 20th century, familiar names of philosophers have been attributed to their rise to popularity with Edmund Husserl being credited as its founding father. It became a major research approach designed to capture our different levels of experiences, particularly those that we have been dealing with for a significant number of years (Smith, 2013).

Similarly, the study of everyday life has always been a familiar subject of inquiry in various social science disciplines. In Sociology, the discussion of everyday life is at its core simply because social and cultural structures are created, strengthened, and transformed in every possible opportunity of social interaction on a daily basis. Sociologist David Inglis (2005) pointed out the paradox of how everyday life is both similar yet different for every individual. He claimed that while we may appear to have boring, usual, and taken-for-granted daily experiences, understanding the social and cultural forces that operate within us every day is necessary to see why we had to deal with such "every day" to begin with. For instance, the variations of everyday between me as an educator in the Philippines and of another educator from another country are a manifestation of how social and cultural contexts greatly affect the way of living of people in their respective countries. Moreover, it is through the "everyday" that sociologists could get further insights into their usual subjects. One cannot uncover the social structures, dynamics, and institutions relative to a certain society without closely observing what its members consider a normal day. Through the understanding of

what goes within their day, sociologists construct the identity of the very society they study (Inglis, 2005).

Anthropology also investigates the significance of everyday life through ethnography as a long-standing, almost-staple methodology. Ethnography is defined as a qualitative research methodology whose primary concern is to study the everyday practices of small societies through an immersive, observatory yet participative role of the researcher (Berry, 2011). With its controversial roots in the early 20th century, ethnography has initially been regarded as a "descriptive account of non-literate peoples" (Radcliffe-Brown, cited from Lowie, 1958, p. 527-528). This racially motivated, imperialistic utilization of what is now known as a common research approach has been the norm for a while and helped in establishing the early reputation of anthropology as an inquiry into the "exotic every day." This is not to reduce anthropology as mere ethnography but rather emphasize its importance as a methodology in the field. Anthropologist Tim Ingold delivered a related lecture in which he underscored the major difference between anthropology from ethnography whilst still recognizing the importance of the latter to the former. Titled *Anthropology is not ethnography* (2007), he delved into the fundamental differences between the two by examining the heated academic debates in the past concerning the two fields, and while there is an undeniable difference between ethnography and anthropology, the question of every day certainly binds the two very well.

History also bears, if not equal, a higher regard for the study of the everyday. French historian Ferdinand Braudel, who led the second phase of the highly renowned movement of the Annales school of historiography, developed a historiographic approach concerning everyday living. Known as the "three-layered time" he claimed that history should be seen in three layers of time operating at different speeds and thus affecting societies at varying degrees. The first "clock" is

what he calls the Longue durée (environmental time), which is very long and almost immobile the majority of people may not be aware of; the second is the medium time where the economic, social, and cultural structures are operational (closer and more likely to directly affect individuals); and finally, the short time, which is comprised of more recent, short-lived events *(Histoire événementielle*) (Fink, 2022). These layers of time are juxtaposed to the respective geographic boundaries of certain civilizations and hence the notion that Braudel's monumental thesis has its roots in the old geographical history or geo-history (Kinser, 1981).

Braudel initially put his framework in what is widely considered his Magnus opus *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean in the Age of Philip II* (1972) where he opened it with a comprehensive discussion of the everyday life of sixteenth-century Europeans with a greater focus on material conditions (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). This allowed him to emphasize the importance of setting the context of what went on in the everyday life of the Europeans before comprehensively tackling other historical events. Similarly, the emphasis on every day continued in his equally remarkable succeeding work *Civilization and Capitalism, 15th-18th Century*, published in 1979. The first volume aptly titled *The Structure of Everyday Life: The Limits of the Possible (Capitalism and Material Life)* once again focused on the daily lives of the Europeans to serve as a guide in reading the other volumes of this multi-part work. Such an approach is Braudel's response to the growing popularity of writing the histories of the common people contrary to the traditional, elite-focused works since the 1950s. As the impact of the Annales historiography has put a premium on shifting the narratives from traditional subjects, its growing influence has also made an impact on Marxist historians who, in response, sought to emphasize the lives of ordinary people. This led to the emergence of what is now known as "history from below"

a remarkable approach during the 1960s (Port, 2015). Other historiographic schools which focus on every day include *Alltagsgeschichte*, a German historical movement that translates to "history of everyday" and has its roots in the 1970s, this social history movement attempts to "reconstruct" the daily life of the "ordinary people'' minus the emphasis on "big social structures" (Templer, 1995). The much broader "History from below" movement also underscores the importance of everyday life.

But how can we study everyday life using geography as a thrust? While it is usual to examine what an ordinary person had to deal with in 24 hours through social-economic, political, or even historical frameworks, it is also equally interesting to look at it from the perspective of space. Canadian Geographer John Eyles wrote about this subject in his contribution to Horizons in Human Geography, a volume composed of articles from humanistic geographers. Aptly titled The Geography of Everyday Life, his chapter called for a more thorough look into the significance of everyday life in the eyes of humanistic geography and how we should veer away from looking at it as a mundane and insignificant subject of academic inquiry. He defined everyday life as a "fundamental reality which creates, maintains and transforms every one of us as self-aware and self-conscious individuals" (Eyles, 1989, p. 102). It is both "under our control" and "beyond our control" as we simultaneously dictate the things we will do for a day while also being made to do certain routines because of social forces that permeate our day-to-day existence. Eyles highlighted the importance of knowing the relationship between (1) structures of society and (2) personal individual biographies as it is from day-to-day living that we get to derive our awareness of our identity. He argued that by looking into these aspects of our lives, our seemingly monotonous and insignificant daily routine starts to make sense. This framework shall be used

in the further discussion of the counter maps. But it is essential to establish what is counter-mapping first.

Countermapping the Everyday

Counter-mapping is essentially the process of creating maps of spaces hidden, intentionally or unintentionally, by conventional sources of power. Defined as "any effort that fundamentally questions the assumptions or biases of cartographic conventions, that challenges predominant power effects of mapping, or that engages in mapping in ways that upset power relations (Harris & Hazen, 2005, cited from Dalton & Desse, 2015)," counter-maps are essentially alternative cartographies that challenge the those that have been produced by dominant and usual sources of power. In other cases, counter-mapping can be a platform for social justice. Edward Said, most known for his post-colonial discourse, considered counter-maps as an "art of resistance" given how it could circumvent the dominant colonial narrative consistently produced by any colonial power (1996, as cited in Quiquivix, 2014). Whether it is a map of indigenous places of worship in a once-colonized country or it of an underground network of roads and streets created by the people of an occupied land so long as these maps tell stories that veer away from the usual origins of power, then it could be a counter-map. Ortega et. al (2018) argued that while conventional mapping has always been used to seize power, counter-mapping can be used to reclaim power and help advance the interests of the marginalized. Citing artistic and pedagogical mapping activities that helped underscore the plight of oppressed communities, cartography in general is no longer just a visualization of spaces but a political tool that can both yield and oppose power.

Understanding one's everyday life can be done by the creation of counter-maps. By allowing individuals to manifest their spatial imagination vis-à-vis their day-to-day experiences in these spaces, one could already unpack a lot through the perspective that is normally unconsidered in the production of maps by institutions of power. Paired with the narratives that are extractable from those individual maps, geo-narratives can be created. Joseph Palis (2022) defined geo-narratives as place-writing; where subjective stories become a form of world-making derived from the realities of the map's creator (p 701). In contrast to a conventional written narrative, a geo-narrative elevates story-telling capacity by adding a visual element. It also uncovers a lot of sociocultural and socio-political dynamics affecting the life of the mapmaker as the personalized map indicates how space is utilized based on the dynamics in place. Furthermore, countermapping serves as an alternative means of narrating stories which cannot be fully expressed in textual or oral forms of narration. This allows narratives from the peripheries to surface in a fashion that is neither dictated nor imposed upon by certain social institutions. However, it is significant to stress that maps are not permanent expressions of spatial imagination. Palis emphasized that they are snapshots of reality that may change their meaning relative to the time it has been examined (or reexamined) and the new learnings and experiences the looker may have gained from its first encounter with the map.

A developing nation of more than 100 million people with social structures emanating from the remnants of the dynamics of its colonial past, the daily struggle of a Filipino is certainly an interesting subject of the study of the everyday in the form of geo-narratives. But how do we capture the stories of their everyday? One way is through mapping workshops. Palis (2022) investigated five mapping workshops and studied how participants were able to provide rich stories through the creation of geo-narratives, which are essentially personal maps significant to

the participant, and it was observed that by organizing such activities, participants have freely and vividly retold their stories in ways that written narratives may not usually capture. These stories, uncovered by the creative and highly personalized nature of counter-mapping, add richness to collective folklore. But how is folklore associated with countermapping and geo-narratives of everyday life?

While the term folktale has been used to refer to any fictitious, short narrative prose orally transmitted among the "folk" of the community (Eugenio, 1985), folklore is not limited to stories but to almost every cultural output known to the people of the community. Burne (1967) defined folklore as a "generic term" that consists of "traditional belief(s), customs, stories, songs, and sayings" known to the rural folk opposite to elite or urban knowledge and customs. It is important to note that Burne's definition of folklore highlights its unconventional character based on its popularity amongst those who do not take part in the culture practiced by the elite although she has used politically incorrect terms such as "backward" and "uncultured" when referring to the folklore as a popular form of culture. Regardless of the undertones of this definition, its gist establishes that every cultural output by people outside the spaces of power that do not adhere to the "official" narratives can be considered folkloric. In this regard, geo-narratives can be considered a form of folklore and the counter-maps in the discussion shall be regarded as visualized folklore.

Personal Counter-maps: Rationale

It was in 2021 when I decided to take the Cultures of Mapping and Countercartographies course under Prof. Joseph Palis. During this time, I needed a cognate course related to mapping in preparation for my thesis writing. Under his class, we were given map projects where we had the liberty to choose a subject

of what to map. Having this freedom to map anything we wanted allowed me to create and interpret my spatial imagination of familiar spaces vis-à-vis my experiences of the pandemic life, which at that time, was the source of the most recent (and recurring) memory. Furthermore, the pandemic life has since then become a popular subject in the academe considering how policies related to epidemiology have greatly altered the daily lives of everyone, especially in the Philippine context. After the semester, I revamped these map projects leading to the writing of this paper to further expand my discussion on these personal geo-narratives highlighting the pandemic life thus producing my take on a narrative atlas.

In this paper, I have chosen to present three of my revamped map projects as these represent the most dominant notions of my *everyday life during* the pandemic. I first reviewed the maps and worked on features that I thought needed some revisions. Then I went through various materials which would support the claims I had in the narratives I derived from the maps. While I could list a thousand reasons why I decided to map my pandemic life, the most compelling reason for me is that I find the recent past couple of years to be the "most strange" in my entire existence. What many of us thought to be a temporary disruption of our usual lives became an enduring reality that we were not ready for. And this reality is not only lived and being lived during this pandemic but has undeniably shaped our not-so-distant futures.

Known for having the longest lockdown in the world, (CNN Philippines, 2020) it is an understatement to describe the Philippine pandemic experience as chaotic. Marred by unclear policies and guidelines that were released days after the President's first public address regarding the outbreak, the state's response to the global crisis manifested in how the Filipinos reacted at the onset of the pandemic. With the declaration of the COVID-19 outbreak as a pandemic by the World

Health Organization in the first quarter of 2020, rumors about the possibility of a lockdown spread all over social media. From conversations among neighbors, spam text messages, speculative social media posts to legitimate information sources and TV news anchors, the buzz about the fears of lockdowns and how they will ultimately affect the freedom of movement of everyone became prevalent. The rumors were fueled by the proclamation of a state of public health emergency on March 9 of the same year (Proc. 922) by then-President Duterte which allowed him to suspend classes and make initial moves in responding to a national concern pursuant to the 1987 constitution (Office of the Press Secretary, 2020). This was succeeded by the expected; Metro Manila was placed in a month-long "community quarantine" on March 15 as the cases in the region saw an upward trend (Talabong, 2020). This meant restricted mobility among the residents of the National Capital Region as land, water, and air travel in and out of the region and between cities were strictly monitored. This series of alarming government pronouncements came just a month after the confirmation of the very first case of COVID-19 in the Philippines.

Furthermore, this declaration expanded the suspension of classes, prohibited mass gatherings, limited mass transportation, and encouraged private firms to introduce flexible working arrangements for their employees (OPS, 2020). These announcements came first before the implementing guidelines and so panic ensued among the many. Between the night of March 12 (when the community quarantine was announced) to the evening of March 14, herds of residents flocked to the groceries and markets to stock up on food. Others saw jam-packed transport terminals and airports as many scoured their way out of the Metro to go back to their respective provinces (Aspinwall, 2020). The lack of detailed instructions and guidelines left not only the Filipinos confused but even some government officials as well. A few days later, the restrictions were extended to the entire Luzon Island.

Duterte signed Proclamation 929 which declared the country's state of calamity for the next six months. This allowed the national and local government units to mobilize the utilization of funds and resources for an immediate response to the increasing cases as well as assign the police and the military to observe peace and order in the affected areas. The same proclamation also placed Luzon under a tighter Enhanced Community Quarantine or ECQ (a first in the series of hierarchical lockdowns) starting midnight of March 17 until April 12. This meant that only those working in healthcare institutions, commerce, and food services will be given exemptions (Bajo, 2020). This marked the beginning of an almost bi-monthly update on imposed restrictions covering Luzon (where most of the cases are) in the next four months, thereby affecting movement among the affected population as illustrated in the map below:

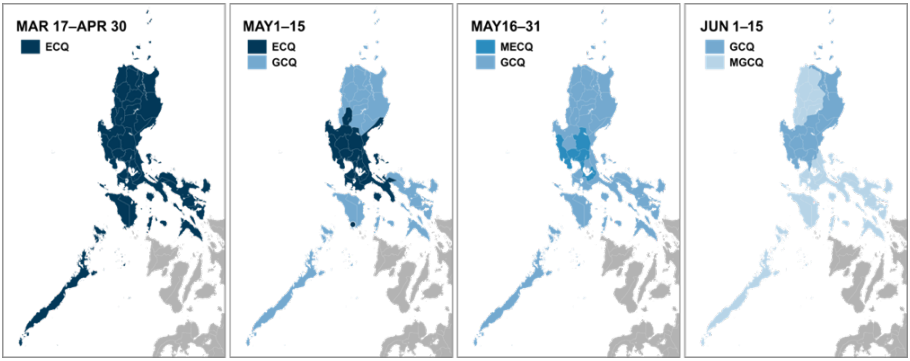

FIG. 1. *COVID-19 community quarantine in Luzon (2020)*[1]

[1] COVID-19 community quarantine in Luzon.svg. (2022, March 2019). Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository. https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?title=File:COVID-19_community_quarantine_in_Luzon.svg&oldid=641558534.

Among the policies implemented during the first weeks of community restrictions, the most impactful were the (1) classification of some household members as APOR or Authorized Person Outside of Residence; (2) halting of mass public transportation and the (3) designation of certain activities in specific types of public and private spaces. These three have undeniably changed what every day meant for an ordinary Filipino. By limiting who can go outside and changing their ways of going to where they usually needed to be, a new sense of the usual slowly made its way to their consciousness. These policies will also be an important subject in the succeeding discussions of the maps as I have personally experienced the implications of these policies and have managed to establish a new "everyday" that is a far cry from the pre-pandemic one. Certainly, these policies became significant forces that directly affected the everyday living of an ordinary Filipino. A remarkable disruption of the mundane and unnoticeable every day meant that greater attention to the "new usual" was also inevitable. Eyles explained this realization of "what has been" as a manifestation of the awareness of the disruption of what would 'normally' be "just like any other day." As he described us as "conscious, self-aware beings who recognize the potential for disruption to everyday life," we start to draw a variety of rich insights into what is happening especially when there is a stark difference from how things used to be (p. 106). To me, this meant that I had to take a break from my usual routes, (which are mainly my way to work and back home) and confront the reality that there are new routes to take and that this will be integral to a new pattern of living akin to the restrictions imposed by the State, which I visually represented through my maps.

Map One*: The MartHopper*

Map-making is storytelling (Palis, 2021). Maps should be read as texts and not as mere "mirrors of nature" (Harley, 2002, p. 36). These should not be considered supplementary visuals to a textual narrative as they should be also considered a "textual" narrative itself, where one can derive stories even in the absence of an accompanying explanation or short caption. Just a few weeks into the discussions and readings in the 292 class, John Krygier and Denis Wood's *Ce n'est pas le* (2008) piqued my interest in what maps I could create. After all, counter-mapping is essentially reinterpreting conventional maps to reflect a more grounded, "bottom-up" representation of the world (Dalton, 2018). This meant I could map my current realities in ways that I could whilst still prioritizing the need to tell a significant story akin to a larger context. But it is from Dennis Wood's (2008) *Dancing and Singing: A Narrative Atlas of Boylan Heights* that I took more inspiration for my counter maps. Upon seeing his maps, I knew that I could map our neighborhood in ways that it hasn't been visualized before. Wood chose his neighborhood and mapped it (radically) by emphasizing its less obvious aspects. My take on his work slightly differs as the maps are (1) central to the pandemic c situation and (2) tell a personal "every day." The first of the three maps that I will present is titled *MartHopper* which shows my usual routes to and from nearby groceries when the restrictions were tighter during the first few months of the community quarantines.

At the onset of the ECQ, the state started requiring each household to assign one APOR (authorized person outside of residence) who will do the essential errands. As movement is limited to accessing basic goods, the assigned individual had to carry a quarantine pass to be allowed entry into establishments. The pass is essentially an ID that contains basic information about the APOR, including the age, that should be worn whenever one is outside because of the checkpoints planted in various areas. In our household, I took the initiative of becoming the

APOR because I did not want to risk and allow either of my parents (who are approaching their senior years) to go to the market or shops. My elder sister on the other hand works as a nurse in a private facility in Taguig and her shifts made it impossible for her to take on the duty of buying goods for the family. Since I worked from home at that time, I had relatively much more free time to shop whenever we needed some supplies. Fortunately, we were situated in an area close to important commercial centers which gave us a lot of options where to get what we needed. This map tells my story as an APOR who had to deal with community restrictions while also observing my well-being.

The red dot represents our house which is my usual point of origin being a teacher in a work-from-home set-up. The three boxes represent the supermarkets I go to whenever a need to shop arises. The sizes of these boxes in the maps are roughly based on their actual area based on Google Maps. The first of the three is *Puregold Jr. Balara*, a smaller grocery store compared to usual *Puregold* groceries, thus the addition of the "Jr." in its name. From our house, it is just a roughly 8-10 minute walk (650 meters). However, aside from the limited items available here (compared to the other two), its limited space meant that only a few customers could shop at a given time because the physical distancing measures for air conditioned, indoor spaces were strictly observed during the first few months of the ECQ. So long lines should be expected when I had to shop in the afternoon because of my morning classes and thus, making this my last resort of the three despite the distance. The blue rectangle represents *Shopwise,* another popular grocery chain owned by the Rustan Group. This bigger shop is roughly a 10–12-minute walk from our house (600 meters) and offers a wider variety of brands and products of all the three groceries in the vicinity. It has also a wider corridor which makes physical distancing measures more realistically observable while also allowing more shoppers to be simultaneously inside (thus shorter queues and

waiting times). The only setback here is its relatively higher prices for its products which is an undeniable concern for me given the economic situation brought by the pandemic, which makes it my second option whenever I need to do the groceries. The orange rectangle is *Ever Commonwealth* (formerly Ever Gotesco), my primary choice in terms of shopping for essentials. Because its supermarket is inside a mall, you'd expect a greater number of people. However, its big land area allows for more shoppers to be accommodated at a given time plus the greater number of cashier lanes to check out the goods make the overall shopping experience faster than the other two groceries.

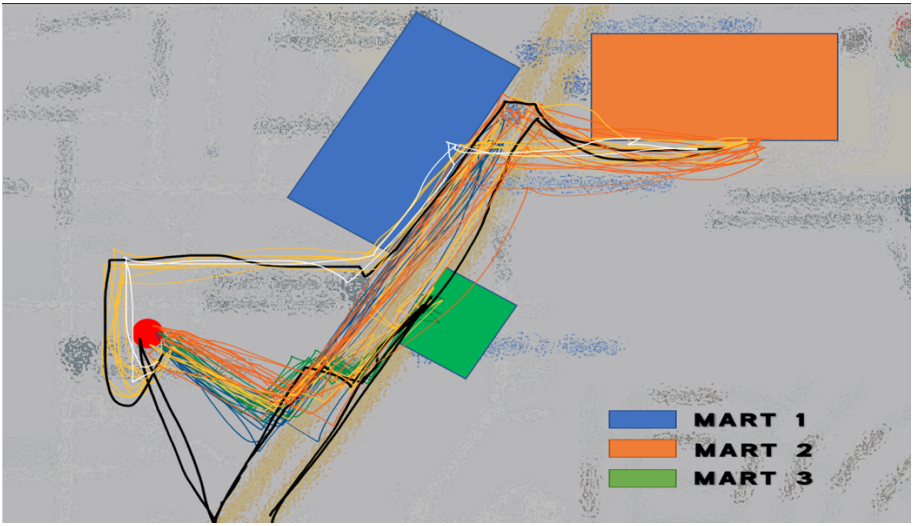

FIG. 2. *MartHopper: Mapping my Pandemic Home-Grocery Routes*

The lower prices and the wider variety of brands make it a far more attractive option than *Shopwise* and *Puregold*, and since it is inside a mall, shopping for non-grocery items adds to the convenience. Yet being a kilometer away from our house makes it the farthest option as I must walk for 14 minutes to get there. This is not an issue if we talk about getting there but going back home is an impediment itself

as I must carry the heavy bags myself. Back when we still didn't have a car, I would take a cab to bring home the groceries as walking while carrying heavy bags while wearing a mask was too exhausting for me.

Other than the factors mentioned, the map also shows my behavior in going to these places using certain routes. Certain occasions require me to visit more than one grocery store as I might not find certain items in one shop alone (hence the yellow lines). In other instances, the time constraints brought by my irregular work schedule may prevent me from going to shops with longer queues and instead going to where fewer people are shopping. But one dominant reason for me having multiple routes as options is my fear of getting the virus. Back then, I wore three layers of mask every time I had to go outside with the face shield as cherry-on-top of my pandemic fit. Such extreme precautionary measures extend to my hesitancy to take shorter routes because of the density of people on these streets. That is why most of the time, I would walk on a less crowded street and use the wide sidewalks of Commonwealth Avenue instead.

I have decided to create this map to showcase my geography of everyday. While it may seem mundane and insignificant to many, I cannot discount the significance of these routes to the development of my self-awareness of our area. Before the pandemic, I hated being told to buy stuff for the house as I was more concerned with my trips and being firm in not wanting my plans to be ruined by a sudden request to get something from these shops. But the pandemic restrictions made me take a second look at our neighborhood and made me more aware of the specificities of the three nearest marts and I have even "developed" these routes that I use whenever I either had to go to one, two, or all three of them just to find a particular item. These routines have become ingrained in my daily life during the first months of the pandemic, a contrast to what my life was like pre-pandemic times.

Map Two: Choking Bottlenecks

One recurring conversation during the early days of the pandemic was defining the term "essential." As confusion ensued among authorities and citizens alike during the dissemination of vague guidelines on the community quarantine, Filipinos took to social media to air their concerns and grievances on the inconsistent observation and implementation of the restrictions. The term "essential" was then loosely associated with basic needs, jobs in an emergency, security, and health sectors as well as travel and movement outside leisure. The IATF (2020) through the Omnibus Guidelines on The Implementation of Community Quarantine in The Philippines defined essential goods and services as anything that:

> covers health and social services to secure the safety and well-being of persons, such as but not limited to, food, water, medicine, medical devices, public utilities, energy, and others as may be determined by the IATF.

This definition limited the access to transportation and travel to those who were considered a worker in any of the sectors mentioned. That's why it was a heavy blow for many carless residents when public transportation was prohibited in areas where ECQ was implemented. Since only private vehicles were allowed to travel (granted that it is essential) the only way one could go to a certain area is either by walking or through a shuttle sponsored either by the local government, police forces, or a private company requiring a skeletal workforce. I was just fortunate that we had a car a few weeks into the ECQ because my sister is a healthcare worker in Taguig. Such immediate disruption of my "usual" commute experience made me more wary of my travel in farther distances because the pandemic made it less frequent. So much so that whenever I travel for very few

instances, I start taking notice of sections of my usual thoroughfare every time I need to go somewhere farther.

This led to me creating this second map called *Choking Bottlenecks: Commuter-Densest points of Commonwealth Avenue During Rush Hours*. This map tells the story of my consolidated commuter experience in Commonwealth Avenue (See Figure 3, encircled) since I learned to travel by my own, including my pandemic commute. The 12.4- kilometer road sitting at the heart of the northern districts of Quezon City is what I grew up calling *kalsada* (as how my mother referred to the highway when I was a kid). Despite being hailed as the widest road in the Philippines (Rey, 2015) having 18 lanes in one section, traffic jams are usual, especially during morning and afternoon rush hours. It is because it's the main corridor of Quezon City districts with the largest barangays in terms of population. That's why it is no surprise that motorists and riders alike fill up the entire road during crucial hours, even amidst the pandemic.

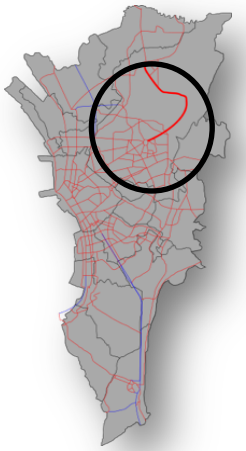

FIG. 3. *Maps of roads in the National Capital Region (Commonwealth Avenue encircled).*

Having passed through the highway countless times, I am beyond familiar with the "chokepoints" during crucial hours. What are these chokepoints? these as areas where people crowd as they wait for PUVs. In pre-pandemic times, morning rush hours were almost unbearable as frequent stops happen in these spots. Commuters gathering at the pillars of footbridges are a common sighting during the morning rush hours. Before, I'd see myself standing in the corridor of the bus already even though I was just a few minutes late from the ideal time to leave before the pandemonium ensues, which is at 5:45 a.m. Since I knew that these chokepoints are usually situated in almost every footbridge, every time the bus stops in these areas, almost everyone standing in the corridor takes the initiative to move further at the end portion of the vehicle to make room for more passengers to get in. But why are these chokepoints located right where the footbridges are? In Commonwealth Avenue, pedestrian bridges serve as common loading and unloading points for people living in the respective barangays because they're often located in intersections, which lead to the neighborhoods near the thoroughfare. Hence, during late afternoon and evening rush hours, these chokepoints transfer to the northbound lane because as most of the passengers in the morning were headed south, they'd pass through the northbound lane as they travel back home. And just like the locations of the chokepoints in the morning rush hours, evening chokepoints are where most of the commuters alight from the PUVs, which are mostly intersections or pedestrian bridges.

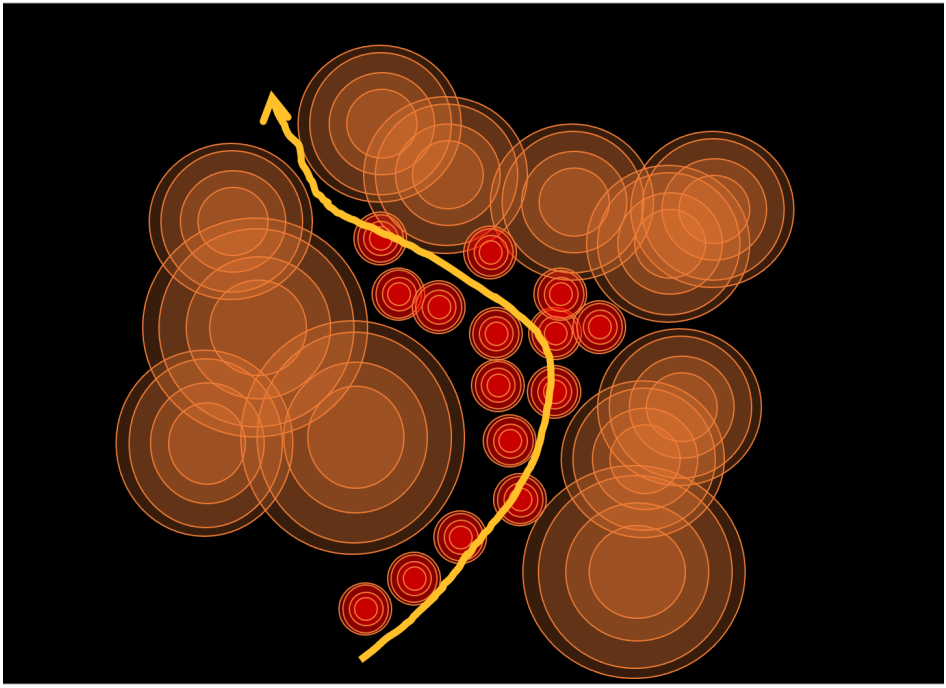

FIG. 4. *Choking Bottlenecks: Commuter-densest points of Commonwealth Avenue during rush hours*

In this map, I represented these chokepoints with red spots along the highway, a thin yellow line, which represents the highway. I also included what I think is the reason for such crowding on the highway despite its wide lanes. The seemingly pulsating orange circles represent the densely populated communities located on either side of the road. It is undeniable that the highway is inadequate for these very populated barangays around it. Among QC residents, it is already a common knowledge that the areas around Commonwealth Avenue are residential; from the exclusive gated communities to middle and low-income neighborhoods, and the highway, being the main artery for all socio-economic groups. In essence, the road becomes a meeting point for everyone, which leads to congestion. The already problematic car-centric design of not only Quezon City but of Metro Manila

makes the wide thoroughfare convoluted with way more cars than PUVs. The shortage of PUVs also creates congestion among commuters who crowd in certain areas during rush hours, thus the chokepoints. What's worse is that the problem is not confined to the city boundaries alone. Commuters from parts of Bulacan sitting next to Quezon City pass through Commonwealth Avenue to reach EDSA, which means that once the buses, jeepneys, and UVs reach the southern parts of the highway, they are already crowded, (most of the time, overloaded) and thus commuters must extend their waiting time just to get to work. Altogether, these factors create these crowds of commuters (red spots) who come from the nearby residential areas (orange spots).

Us residents who live near the major road saw drastic changes when the lockdowns were imposed. The absence of PUVs except for a few buses was noticeable as the road is only filled with fast-moving private vehicles. But that did not last long as the IATF gradually allowed the return of PUVs in the region due to the easement of restrictions. By May 15 of 2020, the IATF along with the local chief executives of all LGUs in Metro Manila downgraded the ECQ to a Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (Lopez, 2020). While mass public transportation was still not present, the easement of restrictions meant that those with private vehicles could travel within the areas of the same quarantine classifications. During this time, my family and I would often pick up my sister from her work (she was a nurse at St. Luke's, Taguig) and buy some dinner on our way back. In these instances of travel, I noticed that a lot of other car users are now back on the same road and that these dominate Commonwealth Avenue. Commuters mostly rely on buses contracted by the QC LGU that offer free rides. The chokepoints gradually made a comeback in the latter half of the year as Metro Manila shifted to a General Community Quarantine, which is the most relaxed of all the quarantine levels assigned by the IATF (Ranada, 2020). When the GCQ

started at midnight on June 1, 2020, public transportation gradually became available once more, but still confined by observing protocols erratically (Luna, 2020). Some buses were packed while some jeepneys did not observe recommended physical distancing. During this time, I only opted to use *GrabCar*, a ride-hailing service, whenever I needed to travel because of my fear of getting the virus on public transportation. But I eventually let loose and started riding PUVs once again as the costs of always using ride-hailing services started to be unbearable. This year, as quarantine restrictions are almost nonexistent, these chokepoints not only make a full comeback, but they have also worsened. The still limited PUVs traversing Commonwealth and the visible increase in car volume are the core reasons why commuters still find traveling on the road beyond challenging. Amid the pandemic, the road made it to the major news outlets several times because of the plight of its commuters. In June 2020, Commonwealth became the poster child of an ill-prepared shift to a lesser stringent General Community Quarantine. Passengers were desperate enough to hitch rides on military and police trucks dispatched by the LGU on an early Monday morning (Rey, 2020). A similar scenario repeated itself in March 2021. With the entry of new variants of the virus that also wreaked havoc in other countries, the country's economic epicenter saw another implementation of the ECQ while still allowing limited PUVs to operate (Gita-Carlos, 2021). Commuters on the infamous highway found it difficult to get to their respective offices due to a lack of operating PUVs. Just this June, the same scenario happened as most of the restrictions were relaxed and many companies have issued a return-to-office (RTO) scheme. The continuous surge in oil prices has forced some PUV operators to halt their trips thus affecting the already worst conditions for commuters. Commuters were seen to have reached the inner lanes of the wide highway as they waited for lesser-occupied jeeps or buses (Manabat, 2021). Now that I travel frequently compared to the past years, having

to go through these chokepoints daily is something I share with fellow commuters. The ongoing construction of MRT Line 7 that will traverse through the road is expected to provide some sort of relief to the commuters in the area.

Map Three Hues of Green

This third in this series expressed my frustrations and disappointment through a counter map. Titled Hues of Green: Mapping the Utilization of Green Spaces in Metro Manila, this map shows the relatively large green open spaces in the metropolis and their respective functions. As a very sociable person, being locked up in the same house or the same room for several months has been beyond taxing for me and social gatherings were my usual way of 'recharging' whenever I needed to. But because of the pandemic, the IATF has banned mass gatherings with a certain number of attendees in indoor spaces and only allowed certain activities to be done in open-air spaces (IATF, 2021). This is where my frustration comes in; the lack of enough open green spaces accessible to the public coupled with my fear of meeting people in malls and indoor spaces was enough to prevent me from getting that much-needed social interaction.

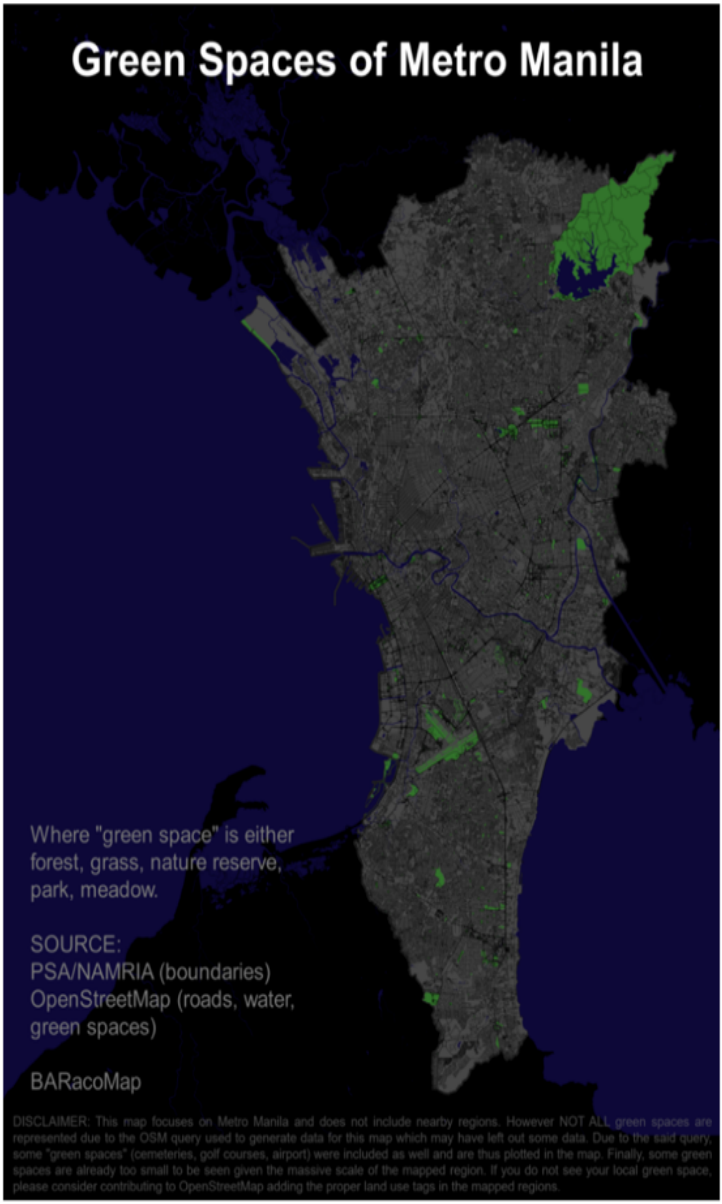

FIG. 5. *Green spaces of Metro Manila*

FIG. 6. *Hues of Green*

This map (Figure 6) shows green spaces across Metro Manila represented by the texts of its respective uses. It is a reinterpretation of a map created by Bernard Alan Racoma (Figure 5) on the American online publishing platform Medium. Using combined data from National Mapping and Resource Information Authority (NAMRIA), the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), and OpenStreetMap, Racoma created a "blank map" that exclusively highlights the green spaces by placing them against a pitch-black background to emphasize the gap between the occupied spaces in the metropolis and the green/grass spaces. My reinterpretation aims to highlight the disparity between the number of open green spaces accessible to the public and those that aren't. Supplying Racoma's map with further data from Google Maps, I confirmed the actual locations of the green spaces and from these, I placed them into four categories; Golf (Courses), Cemeteries (Memorial Parks), Parks (Public Green Spaces), and Reserves (Green spaces intended for watershed/wildlife conservation efforts). Looking at this map, it can be inferred that recreation in green open spaces is a challenging matter for many NCR residents as most of the spaces are either only accessible for the rich (Golf) or not open to the public at all (Cemeteries). A lot of issues can be further discussed from here such as the sense of normalcy of out-of-the-town trips for Metro residents whenever they need to unwind.

Through this map, I wanted to emphasize two things; (1) the significance of green spaces in the context of the pandemic and (2) how big the problem is when an urban area of more than 10 million people lacks accessible open green spaces. The creation of this map was also sparked by an online conversation I encountered about vaccination sites at the time of my conceptualization. A Twitter user shared an insight into conducting COVID-19 vaccinations in a large green open space like the *Wack Wack Golf and Country Club*, which was supported by another tweet calling for the same course of action amidst the problem of finding an

appropriate, open-air site to inoculate Filipinos. These insights went viral amidst a brewing feud between the IATF and Nayong Pilipino administrators because of the proposition of utilizing the latter as a “mega” vaccination site. The debacle went as far as Nayong Pilipino Foundation opposing the move as fears of logging in the area arose to which Vaccine Czar Carlito Galvez Jr. responded that the lives of the Filipinos should "not be equated to the lives of 500 ipil-ipil trees" (Rey, 2021).

Given my frustration of meeting my friends in spaces where the state allows it, I immediately found the soundness in the online sentiments calling for the conversion of these exclusive green spaces to much more accessible areas for the greater public. I shared the perspective of looking at it as "immoral" to have huge tracts of land only to be used by the few rich while the ordinary Filipino is left with malls and other monstrous blocks of concrete for recreational activities. Adding to this pre-pandemic problem is what was then the urgency to look for an appropriate area to conduct mass vaccinations. This map may not be too personal to me at the first glance but as a regular park goer myself, it pains me that I have only a few options where I can sit idly and stare at the nothingness whenever I need to. Such need for parks became more evident when the quarantine restrictions limited certain activities in green open spaces where the risk of transmitting the virus is much lower. And similar to the points I made in the first two maps, this is the everyday I had to share with other Filipinos, where many are deprived of having access to open green spaces, an essential component of any urban dwelling.

The Maps and my Everyday

Eyles (1989) pointed out that our concept of "everyday" is the sum of our biographies and social structures. In these maps, my "everyday" was a result of my

biography of survival vis-à-vis the social forces that require me to be in this kind of daily life.

In MartHopper, I suddenly found normalcy in what I used to avoid (going to the groceries) because I was thrown into the situation. This is what Eyles identified as the ideological dimension of the everyday, which is beyond the socio-economic and political reading of the situation. As a middle-class young professional who needed to provide for the family, I cannot simply stock up on groceries on a less-frequent basis (i.e., monthly) because of other financial responsibilities I had to attend to. This is where the rationalization of my frequent visits to the shops comes in, as I can only shop on a bi-weekly basis in line with my salary cut-offs. Furthermore, the fear of getting the virus stems from the same paradigm as my limited savings will mean another financial blow if I get sick because of the virus. Hence, this map is not just what my everyday is like, it is the everyday that I had to deal with because I am a middle-class worker in a capitalistic society who's trying to make ends meet while surviving in the middle of a global health crisis.

Meanwhile, in Choking Bottlenecks, my everyday varied according to my need to travel farther distances. Here, I acknowledge the privilege of just being an occasional commuter at the height of the pandemic not only because I worked from home, but we eventually owned a car just a few weeks after the imposition of the first community quarantines. However, this wasn't the case for the entire duration of the pandemic as I preferred to travel on my own than be chauffeured by my dad, thus, the return of that pre-pandemic immersion to the hustle and bustle of an almost daily commute that include crowded vehicles and frequent stops at loading areas where most of the passengers come together. Here, we can look at Eyles' concept of Structuration, in which he claims that we relate our usual conduct (everyday habits) to the appropriate structures of these actions. Simply put, we give meaning to the place where we have found a certain level of

attachment. My agency to travel and experience the commuter life again, not just because I did not want to bother my father, but primarily because of how traveling alone gives me a better sense of convenience, may stem from my attachment to Commonwealth Avenue. But this is not limited only to positive, profound sources of the self, Eyles argued that one may also have an attachment to a place but feel "entrapment and drudgery" (1989, p.109). So, while I may have a privileged notion of being a commuter, (as commuting is more of an adventure to me), the rest of my fellow regular passengers, going through that very same road may have been feeling otherwise; that their entire lives, they have been spending hours and hours of grueling travel just to be able to get to work that doesn't pay that much and not make a huge change in their material conditions after all.

Lastly, for Hues of Green, my image of a livable city was influenced by what I consider necessary which was further reinforced by similar sentiments I encounter on online platforms. I find it human to occasionally want to breathe and rest in an open green space just right in the city where it is convenient for me. I am also firm in my claim that these green spaces should be democratized and enjoyed by the upper class. My disdain for this divisive use of green spaces may be explained by how our image of places is affected by a social order that we either accept or reject. Whether this image is associated with the feeling of being discriminated against or the feeling of being in an exclusive group, there is no doubt that places and our everyday experiences with them impact our psychological well-being (Eyles, 1989, p.113). The dominant image of golf courses I have is that it reinforces classicism while parks manifest an image of equality and social justice. That's why I see access to green spaces not as a privilege but a right meant for everyone, and so knowing that social divisions are fueled further by such unfair allotment of spaces, which then in effect strengthens inequality, makes me more eager to join the calls for repurposing of these specific areas and possibly encourage others to do the same.

A lot can be unpacked from these geo-narratives, especially if we also look closer into the parameters of everyday life. As I tell my stories of daily encounters during a pandemic, my behavior, and management of my time as I live my every day in these spaces (represented in these maps), time and space both become important components of my daily existence. Eyles suggests that everyday geography can be further studied with behavioral and time geography as these two help in the analysis of what happens in a day of any individual. Because we are finite beings, we tend to do what he calls Packing, an act of condensing a series of activities to be done within the day as we are aware of our spatial limitations, to begin with (p.112). And in this packed set of everyday itineraries, we get to observe how we behave and act in certain spaces we normally encounter, hence the appropriateness of the two sub-fields of geography. This leaves us with more possibilities in narrating our every day with maps and the corresponding stories we associate them with.

Maps, Folklores and Storytelling

But if it's my goal to tell a story of my every day in a confined space, at a given time, why use maps? I fondly remember what my professor in Geography 292 said in our class; that is because maps are powerful storytellers (Palis, 2021). It allows us to tell certain stories on our terms without being confined by texts. Contrary to the idea that they are just visual tools to supplement a story, maps make us tell more beyond what texts could do. Writing his experiences in five different mapping workshops, Palis (2022) recounts how a geo-narrative approach allowed the participants to tell their stories more profoundly than one would do by just writing them into text. As the participants were asked to be freely creative in making their maps, they were able to convey certain emotions that can only be done visually,

and when the time came for them to share these stories with the rest of the participants, they controlled the narrative, the way they wanted it to be shared. Away from the forces or institutions that might prohibit them from freely doing so.

A similar experience happened to me when we were told to create our map projects. Through the liberty given to map anything in any way we would like, I was empowered to recall my realities and think of the best aspects of it to be mapped. Out of all the things I could think of mapping, it was my everyday life at the height of the pandemic which I believed deserves to be visualized not because I want to romanticize the period in which many of us suffered but because it was an ultimate shift to my pre-pandemic life, just like for almost everyone. It is with the disruption of homogeneity that we start to grow some awareness of what has been, and eventually nostalgia (Eyles, 1989). Furthermore, the significance of material conditions to my daily encounters secured my regard for the pandemic life much more than my pre-pandemic one. The maps also transcend the characteristic of being personal as my experiences in the spaces depicted are shared by others in one way or another which brings about a collective narrative rather than an individual one.

But what makes it qualify as "folkloric?" In this day and age, folklore ceases to be limited to "imaginative" and "untrue." It is now seen as a method, a framework we can utilize to reexamine the narratives of the people (Palis, 2022). In this regard, almost any story can be regarded as one especially if it talks about the usual, the common, the mundane. Eventually, we discover that these stories are not just plain narratives as there's much more meaning to it than what meets the eye. What makes the everyday significant is not the immobile aspects of it but rather our consistent constraints which make it worth examining. Every day, we make meanings, and every day, we interact with our society which makes our lives "filled

with meanings, contexts and behaviors" (Eyles, 1989 p. 116). This not only propels us to build our sense of self but also allows us to socially construct the lives and the entire essence of the existence of others. Thus, we do not exist and interact for ourselves as we have roles in defining each other and our place in society. And in telling these stories, using maps becomes much more sensible. As J.H Parry (1976) once said, "old maps are slippery witnesses." Traditional maps may have missed important points in telling what happened, but he finished the statement with a strong follow-up question "but where would historians be without them?" to indicate that regardless of how certain maps could be inadequate, they are still much helpful, especially to historians who needed a piece of what it was. So, if old, traditional maps can still be relevant to storytellers, what would prevent modern and radical maps any less good?

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