Queer Bodies as Im/Mobile Infrastructure: A Textual Reading of Two Pandemic Stories in the Provincial Context

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ABSTRACT. Queer people's personal stories of the pandemic are often overlooked in mainstream conversations, assumed to be part of the collective narrative. Extending the discussion of mobility as capability into the concept of the body as infrastructure, this paper examines the embodied movement of queer bodies as im/mobile infrastructure. Through queer textual analysis, an alternative method for exploring the personal pandemic stories of two Negrense queer narrators, this study illustrates how their bodies remained socially, spatially, and existentially mobile despite strict lockdowns. Their experiences reveal how queer bodies, as im/mobile infrastructures, rely on their loved ones as well as on their inner capabilities—emotions, concepts, and imaginations—to navigate life spaces that shape their im/mobility. This im/mobility enables engagement with other bodies, spaces, and places, allowing them to live with and toward themselves and others, even within restrictive social/spatial and existential structures.

1.0. Introduction

Negros Occidental, composed of 12 cities and 19 municipalities (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2024), was previously part of the Western Visayas Region before it became a key component of the newly established Negros Island Region (NIR). The people of Negros Occidental are referred to as Negrosanon, although the variant Negrense is also commonly used. The primary language spoken by the population is Hiligaynon, with Cebuano also prevalent in certain areas.

Like all the provinces in the Philippines, Negros Occidental was placed under strict community lockdowns in March 2020 due to coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, immediately after the national government's declaration of the state of public health emergency throughout the country: airports, seaports, and terminals were closed; boundary control points were geographically established; the public was instructed to stay at home, with exceptions made only for those working on the frontlines. Geographical closures

resulted in major socioeconomic inequalities, where marginalized sectors, including LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) community, experienced difficulties in freedom of movement to access support. Studies have shown that gender minorities are among the marginalized sectors that suffered significantly from job losses and terminations during the pandemic (Dehars & Iskandar, 2020; Gil et al., 2021; James, 2020; Martino et al., 2021) and lacked psychosocial and medical care services support (Campbell, 2021; Felt et al., 2021; Kara et al, 2022). This resulted in their well-being, security, and safety being doubly jeopardized (Chakrabarti et al., 2021; Fish et al., 2021; Sharpe & Rajabi, 2021; Walsh & Stephenson, 2021).

However, after two long years of being unable to engage in face-to-face activities due to the pandemic, various LGBTQ+ communities and groups from around the province took to the streets to celebrate the 2022 Pride Month. For instance, the province-wide Negros Pride 2022 (one of the activities of Negros Pride Celebration 2022) – which was organized by Humanist Alliance Philippines International (HAPI)-Bacolod City Chapter, was held in Bacolod City, the capital of Negros Occidental. Living up to the theme *Over the Rainbow,* the participants of Negros Pride 2022 did not only fill the

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celebration with vibrant colors and creative performances but also testified to the community's collective call for equal protection of the law. To quote Eldemar R. Sabete in his article posted in the official website of HAPI, he wrote: "Pride encompasses our empowerment, the development of our identity as humans, and the creation of more inclusive and safe spaces to spread love" (Sabete, 2022, para. 2). Other health-based non-government organizations (NGO) like Bagani Community Center also initiated proactive programs benefiting people living with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which included the launching of HIV treatment center and HIV self-testing programs (SunStar, 2022). There were also similar pride activities initiated by LGBTQ+ groups in different cities and towns within the province throughout the month of June.

The Negros Pride 2022 marked the first major physical gathering of the members of the LGBTQ+ community in the province since the pandemic began in 2020. While this event served as a visible sign of hope for the LGBTQ+ community to reclaim what was lost during these challenging times and move forward, little is known about how they navigated life through the layers of social inequalities that they have experienced during the pandemic—an aspect of their life narrative that has been overlooked in mainstream conversations.

While studies have explored queer people's lives during the pandemic, none have specifically collected queer stories/narratives of the pandemic and analyzed them through the intersections of queer textual analysis, mobility as capability, and bodies as infrastructure. In light of this gap, this paper then examines the collected texts through the lenses of the body as infrastructure (Andueza et al., 2021) and mobility as capability (Kronlid, 2016). Focusing on Negrense queer bodies as im/mobile infrastructure within the stories of the pandemic of two self-identified Negrense queer individuals (henceforth, narrators), this paper attempts to explore (1) the various articulations of queer im/mobility in the collected texts and (2) how the narrators' experience of im/mobility might render bodies into infrastructures and define their im/mobility as capability. In the hope to provide an alternative discussion of queer peoples' experiences of mobility during the pandemic, this paper aims to reveal new perspectives on how the narrators navigate life relative to their current situations, potential insights that may serve as valuable baseline information for local government units in policymaking or for organizations—both public and private—working to improve the quality of life for queer community members. As a delimitation, the analysis offered by this paper does not aim to compare queer experiences with heteronormative ones, nor does it attempt to provide a collective or generalized perspective on the pandemic experiences of queer individuals. Instead, it focused on individual stories of the narrators as unique narratives, exploring how these queer experiences resonate with and connect to the experiences of all people, regardless of gender, during the pandemic. To further clarify the relevant terms used in the study, "queer" refers to all non-heteronormative groups (Scheller-Boltz, 2017). Therefore, in this study, queer is used to describe the LGBTQ+ community or individuals. Meanwhile, the term "provincial context" does not aim to compare queer pandemic narratives from different provinces but rather emphasizes that the stories being analyzed originate from a provincial setting.

2.0. Theoretical Lens

Human body, body as capability, and body as infrastructure

On the human body. The phenomenology of the human body is closely linked to many facets of our lives: philosophical, scientific, spiritual, political, artistic, erotic, or socio-cultural. Our understanding of our own body and the meanings attached to it are shaped by the complex environments where our body resides and moves. In his work *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1943, as cited in Morris, 2010, p. 5) describes the body in two dimensions: "being-for-itself" and "being-for-others." These dimensions suggest that we perceive our bodies both through our own experience and through the eyes of others. This dual perception positions the body not only as a site of self-awareness but also as something shaped by social interactions. Crossley (2010, p. 215) describes the body as "visible, tangible, and audible," showing how it exists within and responds to the social world. Monaghan (2016, p.126) expands Blumer's (1966) notion of the human bodies as social objects by emphasizing that the meanings attached to bodies are influenced by people's actions, geographical contexts, and personal demographics (e.g., class, gender, age). Along these lines, Rothwell (2010) views the body as an "expressive space," and Crossley (2016) defines it as an "embodied reflexive selfhood" that continually responds to societal norms and scientific progress.

The lived body is also a topic of discourse in bioethics which views the body as a vulnerable physical entity subject to medical and scientific interventions (Jones, 2011). Understanding the body in this context acknowledges its organic composition, including its ability for self-repair and temporality. Papalois and Papalois (2020) liken the human body to a natural ecosystem, capable of adapting to various ecological phenomena, such as "wound healing and regeneration" (Papalois & Papalois, 2020, p. 94). In this bioethical sense, our body holds an ecology of embodied stories—

pain, suffering, healing—that are inherently social because the "shape and form [and] metaphors and language of [these stories] are all artifacts of the social" (Frank, 1995, as cited in Jones, 2011, p. 82).

Drawing from archaeological perspectives, the human body is seen as material culture that provides a window into our individual and collective histories (Sofaer, 2006). Examining the human body as embodied material culture, several gender perspectives, such as Foucault's surveillance and control, Butler's gender performativity, Haraway's hybrid body, and other post-structuralist perspectives on archaeology contribute to discussions on how human bodies construct lived experience in the material world (Crossland, 2010). This 'gendered' experience deepens our current understanding of the intersection of materiality, embodiment, and bodies—situating the bodies as both confined and constructed within the material world.

Building on the concept of the human body as an archive, Lepecki (2010) examines how contemporary re-enactments of past dance performances embody personal and cultural memories. Lepecki contends that revisiting past choreographies through re-enactments archives them in the corporeality of contemporary dancers. Lepecki's notion of "will to archive" past performances through re-enactments stems from, but does not duplicate, Hal Foster's concept of "archival impulse" or an artist's will to find connection to a seemingly misplaced past shaped by cultural memory (p. 29). Expanding on Foster's idea of creative impulse, Lepecki (p.31) suggests that this 'will to archive' allows dancers or choreographers to "identify in a past work" as a way to embody memories. Rather than replicating memories, these 'embodied actualizations' create a 'choreographic activation' of the past, positioning the dancer's body as an "endlessly creative, transformative archive" (p. 46).

The human body is not only a vessel of memory but are also a weapon of violence as in the case of war narratives. Sharghi (2019) explores this through a multivocal study of a soldier who fought in and survived the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), using the combined participant's interview narratives, photographs, among other relevant personal documents including the survivor's medical records. As predicated from the narrative, the soldier's body served a dual purpose: as a target of violence and a combat machine designed to destroy the enemies. Military standards dictate that a soldier's body must be transformed from a 'human body' into a 'fighter's body,' a weaponized entity conditioned to "kill or be killed" with honor and masculinity embedded in this transformation (p. 52).

Another perspective on the human body is its role as evidence in the post-truth era, where evidence-based knowledge is challenged by alternative facts and historical revisionism. Maguire et al. (2018) examine this in the context of national, geographical, and political in/security, exploring how bodies are used to combat biometric discrimination, border conflicts, and security threats. For example, forensic and biometric advancements in recent times enable scientists and investigators extract evidence from the body—whether through physical analysis, technology, or reading visual cues and gestures.

Mobility as capability. The various articulations of the human body implies that the body itself is a mobile subject capable of constantly moving within an environment shaped by material, ecological, sexual, social, cultural, political, or scientific realities. Our daily activities whether performed individually or collectively, reflect mobility—even when our body is at rest (e.g., sleeping or waiting). In other words, the body's movement connects to spaces and places near and far, physical or virtual, across past, present, and future. Kronlid's (2016) framework of mobility as capability explores its intersection with social justice and gender, positioning the body as a subject of inequality in search of fairness. This mobility in pursuit of equality can be seen as capability based on Amartya Sen's 'capability approach,' which assesses well-being based on what individuals are "able to do and to be" (p. 16). Despite critiques, Sen's framework remains relevant in gender studies for its focus on social change and justice in a society that imposes rigid gender role. When the body is gendered, it faces immobility through marginalization and exclusion. The intersection of gender, mobility, and capability is thus key to articulating the "ethical dimensions of mobility in terms of social exclusion and discrimination" (Kronlid, 2016, p. 19).

Kronlid expands on Alkire and Black's (1997) 'practical and theoretical reasons' to argue why mobility should be considered a capability. The practical criteria suggests that mobility contributes to well-being when people recognize its impact based on personal experience and its grounding in "ecological, economic, and social context" (Kronlid, 2016, p. 21). The theoretical criteria require establishing mobility's intrinsic value and its relationship to other capabilities, as reflected in Robeyn's (2003) and Nussbaum's (2005) lists of capabilities, where mobility (or Bodily Integrity) ranks tenth and third, respectively. The other capabilities in Robeyn's (2003, p. 71-72) list include: life and physical health, mental well-being, bodily integrity and safety, social relations, political empowerment, education and knowledge, domestic work and nonmarket care, paid work and other projects, shelter and environment, leisure activities, time-autonomy, respect, and religion. Meanwhile, other capabilities in Nussbaum's (2005, p. 41-42) list include: life, bodily health, senses/imagination/though, emotions, practical

reason, affiliation, other species, play, and control over one's environment. While distinct, these lists share interrelated dimensions, with mobility primarily understood as spatial movement.

Kronlid (2016, p. 23) suggests that Robeyn's and Nussbaum's limitation of mobility as capability to spatial movement may stem from the divide between feminist perspectives and mobilities paradigm, as well as the idea that the "capability of being socially mobile" is embedded in other capabilities. To address this gap, Kronlid juxtaposes mobility as capability and existential mobility. Social mobility recognizes the body's ability to move vertically and horizontally, engaging with others and spaces (embodied movement/interaction). This enables individuals to achieve a "satisfying and safe sex life," build meaningful relationships, and make political choices (Kronlid, 2016, p. 24). Meanwhile, existential mobility, refers to movement within existential space, an "intermediate area between the individual and the environment" (Nynäs, in press, as cited in Kronlid, 2016, p. 25). This space allows the individuals to use "inner capabilities such as emotions, concepts, and imaginations" to create and sustain a meaningful existence (p. 26).

Scholarship on mobility as capability has gained increasing attention across disciplines, particularly in the context of human development, such as migration. As a form mobility, migration facilitates the movement of people, goods, services, cultural productions, and information, all of which are fundamental drivers of human development (De Haas & Rodríguez, 2010). However, while mobility can enable access and opportunity, it is often constrained by social and structural barriers. A key aspect of national development is creating an inclusive society that fosters a sense of home, yet obstacles like gender inequality and poverty persist. Chattier (2012, p. 12) discusses the "feminization of poverty" and the broader "gendered character of all poverty" in Fiji, which limit women's capabilities in well-being, freedom, autonomy, and mobility. Similarly, Steinem (2021, p. 16) examines gender disparities in India, where 'marginalized informal workers,' despite their mobility, remain confined by traditional expectations that tie their work to domestic responsibilities, restricting their spatial capability. Beyond gender, structural challenges also shape immigrant experiences of mobility. Shin (2011) highlights how immigrant Korean women in the U.S., despite adapting to their new environment, struggle with mobility due to challenges in daily routines and transportation.

Mobility as capability also intersects with education, particularly in addressing gender and capability inequalities. Chikunda (2015) argues that education must undergo curricular reforms to empower students and grant them the freedom to shape their futures. Likewise, Terzi (2014, p. 479) contends that making education inclusive for students with disabilities requires schools to uphold "educational equality as capability equality." Meanwhile, technology plays an increasingly significant role in expanding mobility as capability. Haenssgen and Ariana (2018) illustrate how mobile phones enhance healthcare access for remote patients, improving their "health-related capabilities." Similarly, Hafermalz et al. (2020, p. 764) describe how "moving-with-technology" — carrying portable devices — changes how individuals perceive and interact with the world, shaping their 'direct perception of the environment.

The body as infrastructure. The juxtaposition of these two concepts, queer body and infrastructure, may initially seem like an impossible pairing, as they appear to stem from completely opposite sides. However, this contrast is precisely what makes queer discussions interesting, challenging the assumption that something fixed or "straight" can be reimagined. Here I explore relevant concepts that demonstrate how bodies can be understood as infrastructure. Drawing on the framework of Andueza et al. (2021), this perspective allows us to see how bodies, typically considered individual or isolated, can function as integral components within larger socio-economic structures. In their work, *The Body as Infrastructure*, Andueza et al. (2021, pp. 800-801) argue that human bodies function as infrastructure by enabling the flow of services, goods, and commodities in capitalist society. Like roads or railways, bodies sustain these flows but can also disrupt them, opening new directions for 'emotional, social, and other ways of living.' Claiming the human body as infrastructure does not reduce it to inert matter or a mere tool of capitalism but instead opens new ways to explore its evolving role within shifting "social formations."

Bodies serve as tools for movement and connection within a broader social context. This means their role in infrastructure is complex and evolving. They contribute to both production and social relationships while being shaped by capitalist infrastructural practices that treat them as "specific technologies." As Andueza et al. (2021) explain:

> Bodies may well be technologies of circulation but those bodies exist within broader social formation in which meanings are constructed, in which love, care, anger and repair are all felt, experienced and acted upon […] The functioning of the body as infrastructure, that is to say, is uneven, contested and incomplete. It spans the realms of both production and social reproduction. (pp. 806, 810)

To elaborate on this concept, the following discussion of relevant literature examines how scholars across disciplines have explored the body as infrastructure in various ways. Simone (2021), in "people as infrastructure," argues that people are entangled in complex urban networks, assimilated into 'collective populations, economies, and social vulnerabilities.' Reframing this as bodies as infrastructure, bodies become active participants in producing and sustaining urban life, embedded in political, social, and economic processes. Similarly, Ridell (2019) examines how bodily routines shape urban infrastructure, yet remain overlooked in theoretical discussions. Ridell argues that urbanites embody infrastructural power through daily practices, which are fundamental to understanding infrastructure. This perspective aligns with bodies as infrastructure, emphasizing how physical experiences sustain urban life.

Scholars have also examined how marginalized and laboring bodies maintain infrastructure. Zhang (2019, p. 102) explores China's failed 'citizens recycling program' due to a lack of public support, leading to an increase in "invisible laboring bodies" burdened with waste collection. These bodies become integral to urban infrastructure, reinforcing the idea that infrastructure relies not only on physical structures but on the labor and bodies that keep it functioning. In another context, Truelove and Ruszczyk (2022) investigate how marginalized bodies in urban Nepal and India function as infrastructure where physical systems are inadequate. Gendered practices—such as caregiving and informal labor—compensate for these infrastructural failures, with these bodies sustaining urban life in often visible ways. Gendered bodies as infrastructure, therefore, function as necessary elements for survival in cities, yet they are frequently overlooked in urban planning and policy discussions.

The role of bodies in ensuring public health and safety further expands this discussion. Desai et al. (2015) examine the intersection of body and sanitation infrastructure in socio-economically challenged areas, focusing on how urban populations navigate these systems. Their study reveals open defecation practices among the urban poor and their impact on sanitation policies, showing how bodies interacting with infrastructure become integral to urban systems. Canoy et al. (2021) advance a similar argument in their concept of "bodies-in-waiting as everyday infrastructure" within the context of quarantine as a form of discipline. They suggest that bodies-in-waiting are not merely contained within the physical structure where discipline is imposed but rather become embodied infrastructure themselves.

3.0. Methodology

The textual data for this analysis, consisting of two personal stories of the pandemic, were collected through online interviews via a messaging platform. The participants, who self-identified as gay and gender-fluid, respectively, met the selection criteria: they were self-identified members of the queer community, had experienced the pandemic in Negros Occidental, and were living with a long-term partner in the same household during the pandemic. Limiting the study to two stories follows Creswell's recommendation that narrative analysis often involve "1-2 participants," especially when the goal is not to construct a collective narrative but to explore individual stories within a shared context (Guetterman, 2015, as cited in Staller, 2021, p. 4). This study does not aim to generalize queer experiences in Negros Occidental but focuses on individual narratives within the provincial context. It seeks to describe and interpret these unique stories while considering their broader relevance to understanding queer experiences during the pandemic. Meanwhile, the use of chat interviews aligns with queer methodologies (Browne & Nash, 2010) by providing a flexible, non-traditional data-gathering format. This approach allows queer narrators to express themselves authentically (Sullivan, 2012) and offers practical benefits such as convenience, transcription ease, flexible scheduling, and rich interpretive possibilities (Bryman, 2012; Gunawan et al., 2016; Hinchliffe & Gavin, 2009; Rose, 2016; Lied, 2019). The participants, referred to as narrators in this study, were interviewed individually at their convenience, with chats occurring both synchronously and asynchronously. This format facilitated a continuous dialogue, with responses exchanged based on our mutual availability. Data collection adhered to ethical guidelines, including signed consent and participant anonymity.

The collected personal stories were contextualized as queer texts because they express queer identities and experiences, and language that challenge heteronormativity, and because of the way they were gathered. This aligns with de Lauretis' (2021) definition of queer texts, which encompasses any text that challenges or subverts heteronormative assumptions and expectations. The stories were then analyzed using queer textual analysis, an alternative approach that emerged from queer methodologies (Milani et al., 2022), to explore intersections of personal narratives, sexuality, power, and identity. Informed by Van Dijk's (2005) critical discourse analysis, this approach examines how queer bodies navigated confined spaces during government-imposed lockdowns. These lockdowns and mobility control mechanisms are seen as power structures that impose control over queer bodies, making

the two Negrense queer stories well-suited for this analytical approach.

The analysis began with reading the collected personal stories of Negrense queers during the pandemic, followed by the extraction of discursive symbols from their language, metaphors, storytelling, and other narrative elements. This process aimed to uncover meanings and construct situational meaning based on the context of their experiences (Park, 2010). The personal stories align with Riessman's (2005) description of first-person accounts focused on specific topics, characters, setting, and plot.

To address potential subjectivity in the analysis, I acknowledge my reflexivity as a queer Negrense who also experienced the pandemic in my province, recognizing that my experiences and perspectives may influence the interpretation of the data. To ensure objectivity, I anchor my analysis in the study's critical lenses and involve an external reader to verify that the thematic discussions accurately reflect the collected narratives.

4.0. Results and Discussion

The first story is about North, a 32-year-old gender-fluid individual who has been in a loving relationship with his partner, Allan, for nearly eight years. When the Covid-19 started, North's work transitioned to a remote setup due to their company's work-from-home policy, while Allan was unfortunately laid off. Despite the challenges, this unexpected turn of events deepened their bond as they reflected about life, love, and career together. During this time, North and Allan found solace in spending more quality time together, engaging in meaningful conversations about their hopes, dreams, and fears. Allan's unemployment, while initially stressful, presented an opportunity for them to reassess their priorities and strengthen their relationship. Living in uncertain times, like countless others worldwide, North and Allan discovered a newfound resilience within themselves and a deeper appreciation for each other's companionship.

In the second story, South, a 31-year-old crossdressing gay man who identifies as such, recounts how the pandemic tested his four-year relationship with his partner, Alex. Living in a shared home with South's family, they grappled with unemployment and isolation as the pandemic disrupted their daily lives. Despite these hardships, their relationship strengthened as they relied on each other for support and even found ways to help their community, which also helped them cope with isolation.

North's and South's personal stories of the pandemic echo their experiences within the physical structures of their homes, as well as outside, where they could still navigate—virtually or physically—though in a very limited way. This means that their individual experiences during the pandemic were shaped by both their home environments and the outside world, where their mobility was restricted but still possible—whether through virtual means or limited physical movement—something they were not used to before the pandemic. As North described his social life as well as the life of his partner prior to the pandemic:

> *It's more sa ... party and get together with friends…but now…all gone kay priso kita sa aton nga balay.* (We are an outgoing couple. We often attend parties and go out with friends. But these are no longer possible because we are confined inside our home.)

North likened himself to a prisoner denied of the freedom of movement. This is because his mobility has been limited to the four walls of their apartment:

> *Limitado gid. First time ko wala ka gwa sa apartment for almost a year*. (My social activities are limited and that was my first time to experience physical confinement, literally without going outside the apartment for almost a year.)

This also resonates in South's personal narrative. As a freelancer who regularly interact with people from all walks of life from different parts of the province, South was caught unprepared of the looming challenges that he and his partner had to face especially when border controls were implemented, requiring everyone to stay at home. Based on South's nature of work as a freelancer, his recollection of the pandemic revolves around how his limited to no mobility outside the home reduced his opportunities for physical socialization. As South recalled:

> *Dako nga problema ang nahatag sang pandemic… ilabi na kay indi ka gwa ang tanan.* (The pandemic posed a major challenge especially that everyone was not allowed to go out.)

Moreover, while the home has become the safest space for both North and South and their respective partners during the pandemic, it also posed risks to their economic stability and mental health. Employed in a business outsourcing company, North had to relocate his office to their small apartment, specifically inside their bedroom—the only quiet space that made work-from-home free from distractions. For North, a confined body means having limited spatial freedom, which has caused him to feel more anxious day by day. As he narrated:

> *Kay ang apartment namon is not big. Ang room namon diri man ang computer ko na butang and diri naman nag work during pandemic. Ang*

feeling mo sang work on site ka bilin tanan mo na ubrahon sa office. And Indi ka ma minsar work liwat since wala ka sa office. But sang work-from-home na, ang work is at home na. (Our apartment is small, so I've set up my computer in our bedroom for work. I feel that working from home tends to be more stressful compared to working onsite, where I can literally leave my office concerns behind after work.)

What North implies is the blur boundary between work and personal space. While he can virtually connect with clients and perform tasks from home (mobility), he is physically confined to his apartment, particularly his bedroom (immobility), especially as he began associating their bedroom with his workspace.

Meanwhile, South and his partner became jobless during the pandemic, and their home turned into a miniature version of the world, where they had to navigate daily to survive even in the most difficult situations. As freelancers, they lacked sufficient financial savings to sustain their basic needs. In short, they struggled financially, especially during the first few months of the community lockdowns when no one was allowed to go out. South shared that being spatially immobile made it difficult for them to find any source of income:

Hindi ta ma-deny kung ano kabudlay ang… ang pandemya, pero ang worst gid na eksperyensahan ko nga upod ko akon nga partner, nga kung paanu mapa-igo ang nabilin nga bugas nga para bwas, kag para sa masunod nga adlaw! Tungod hindi ka gwa sa puluy-an para makapangita sang raket nga makakwarta! Pwerti kabudlay katama mag adjust sang una nga pagsulod sang Covid19! (We can't deny how difficult the pandemic was, but the worst experience I had with my partner was figuring out how to make our supply of rice last for tomorrow, and the days after that. We can't leave the house to find a job and earn money. It was really a tough time for us.)

South's difficult economic condition might not be due to his (and his partner's) inability to look for any financial resources to sustain their needs, but due to his lack of mobility.

What further connects North's and South's individual stories is the familiar thread of mundane experiences where both have proven that despite the limitations in the social/spatial spaces, life is still capable of moving and navigating the immediate life space. Although confined to their respective local government units, their stories are connected through their ability to engage with their partners or with others. North shared that his relationship with his partner deepened during the

pandemic, as his partner made sure that his needs were met. As North shared:

During that time isa lang ang may pass. Ara kami sa midtown, lakton nya pa mall. Or sa kung din man para ka bakal sang food kag kinanlan namon. One time need ko ang extension na tatlo ang buho para sa computer ko. And ginlakat nya lang halin sa amon pakadto sa mall asta sa isa pagid ka mall. (At that time, we were given one quarantine pass. We were somewhere midtown, and he had to walk all the way to the mall—or wherever—to buy food and other things we needed. One time, I needed a three-slot extension cord for my computer, and he walked from our apartment to the mall, then to another mall just to find one.)

In the same vein, South believes that his relationship with his partner has strengthened during the pandemic. When community restrictions were loosened but still in place, they took the initiative to help their community, an advocacy effort that became a meaningful way for them to bond:

Ang hindi ko malipatan nga… sang pandemic… daku ang amun nga na contribute sa amun komunidad… kami duwa nag buligay nga makapangita pamaagi nga makahatag bulig sa na lockdown nga duwa ka Barangay. Nag abot sa time nga gin himu nalang namun nga duwa nga bonding moments ang… mamakal sang prutas nga pwedi ibaligya, kag ang ginansya namun amu ang amun gina bulig! Kakapoy pero masadya ang amun bonding moments nga duwa kay kami nakahimu sang maayo sa amun kumunidad… (One thing I'll never forget about the pandemic is how much we were able to help our community when lockdown policy loosened a bit in our area. In our own way, we extended help to two barangays—like buying fruits to resell and using the money to help others. It was tiring, but it was fun too, knowing that somehow, we're doing something good for our community.)

Lastly, the two collected narratives illustrate the home as an existential space, a liminal zone where queer narrators find both safety and security yet also face danger and struggle while navigating their queer realities in isolation. In this space, they have come face to face with life, reflecting on their experiences and circumstances. North reflected that:

The struggles in life, that maski ano ka dulom sa kabuhi indi ini permanent. Miski ano ka budlay, may ara gid gyapon tawo nga masaligan nga mag comfort simo…. Sometimes I see myself like the moon… wala sya iya nga light but ga shine sa. (The struggles in life no matter how difficult, aren't permanent. That there will always be

someone you can rely on. Sometimes, I see myself like the moon…it doesn't have its own light, but it still shines.)

This is also reflected in the story of South, as he sees the pandemic as an opportunity to deepen his relationship with his partner, especially in how they overcome their problems together. As South recalled:

Dako nga problema ang nahatag sang pandemic sa tanan, pero daku man nga pasalamat ko nga nag labay ang pandemic sa atun nga kabuhi, kay diri gid kami gin takos kung pano namun masolbar ang problema kag kung panu kami mag buligay nga duwa nga maka survive sa isa ka adlaw kag sa madason nga adlaw. (The pandemic negatively affected everyone, but I'm still grateful we went through it. It really tested our patience as partners, especially in how to face the situation and make it through each day.)

When we view the queer body as an embodied im/mobile object/subject, constantly moving within a specific life space (e.g., pandemic-stricken world, home-based work, isolation, etc.), it emerges as a potential complex infrastructure—a socio-ecosystem capable of self-repair and regeneration, a material culture that is produced and consumed by the material world, or an archive that holds past and present memories (Lepecki, 2010; Papalois & Papalois, 2020; Soafer, 2006). Building on Andueza et al.'s (2021) concept of 'human body as infrastructure,' the individual stories of North and South illustrate how queer bodies—vulnerable and isolated yet creative and adaptable—can be understood as infrastructure that functions as both agents and affected bodies within the socio-political and economic situations during the pandemic. As infrastructure, queer bodies are subject to specific demands. The pandemic obliged them to perform either familiar or entirely new socio-economic roles for safety, security, or simply survival. Much like traditional infrastructure, these roles can be viewed as "basic physical... structures" (Andueza et al. 2021) designed to perform specific functions dictated by the prevailing social and economic systems. In this context, state-imposed policies restricting movement of people, information, goods, and services influence these expectations. For example, both North and South, confined to their homes due to government mandates, become compliant infrastructure. North transitions to a work-from-home setup, while South, who previously worked as a freelance service provider, experiences unemployment due to business closures. These contrasting experiences between North and South speak of the effects of state-imposed policies on these 'infrastructural' bodies.

Another articulation of the queer body as infrastructure is through its capacity to sustain and be sustained by 'love, care, and repair.' As Andueza et al. (2021) explain, the body as infrastructure does not imply humans as static entities, akin to the physical structure of a building. Rather, it refers to how bodies adapt their functions to the needs of their environment, just as buildings are designed to serve for specific purposes. This means that infrastructures extend beyond their physical forms; their designs are about more than just aesthetics. Some infrastructures are built with communal spaces that allow for social interaction, connection, support, and healing (Klinenberg, 2018; Rishbeth & Rogaly, 2018), while others provide personal space for areas for self-care, introspection, and reflection (Huvila, 2019; Samson, 2021). During the pandemic the queer bodies of North and South, even when confined (immobile relative to the social outside world) in isolation with their partners (and with family members, as in the case of South), demonstrated their capacity to adapt and function as infrastructures capable of 'love, care and repair' (Andueza et al. 2021, p. 800) amidst the given circumstances. This is evident in their stories, where they adapted to the limitations on physical connections by turning to online communication. Through video calls, online shopping, and other virtual activities, they maintained relationships and sustained emotional connections with friends, family, and the outside world (mobility relative to the new expectations of home confinement). For North and South, their queer bodies became infrastructure that held these stories—personal experiences of struggle but also of hope. Much like any socio-ecological infrastructures which afford shelter, recreation/entertainment, among other human acts and practices, the queer bodies have the capacity to provide care, security, and protection, further ensuring well-being and growth for oneself and others. As the stories of North and South illustrate, queer bodies rely on their own inner capabilities to continue to interacting with other bodies, spaces, and places, living and moving towards oneself/others (Kronlid, 2016).

Grounding on Kronlid's (2016) concept of social/spatial and existential mobility as capability, both North and South might be seen as im/mobile subjects that are in constant motion relative to the state-imposed policies on public health and safety. This means that the queer individuals' social/spatial and existential mobility or immobility is largely dictated by the controlling policies of the nation. In the language of mobility as capability, the narrators' limited, or even absence of, social/spatial and existential mobility may be described as a violation to the ethical aspect because human immobility may be a form of social exclusion and discrimination. While feelings of exclusion and isolation were a common experience for many, regardless of

gender during the pandemic, the narrators' personal stories suggest that their sense of im/mobility might be particularly challenging. Not only were they unemployed, working from home, or struggling financially, but they also faced socio-political inequalities that marginalized them from mainstream discourses on equal rights, including social welfare services, food supply, and psychosocial support (Salerno et al., 2020). Studies have shown that the pandemic intersects with gender and social justice (Guerrina et al., 2021; Laster Pirtle & Wright, 2021; Siriwardhane & Khan 2021), and the experiences of North and South illustrate this intersection. As queer individuals, their mobility was limited by social expectations, both physically and virtually due to their work or unemployment. Gendered social expectations, such as routinary domestic tasks and providing for the family, can further restrict social/spatial or existential mobility/freedom, making the pandemic even more challenging for certain gender groups (Shin, 2011; Chattier, 2012; Steinem 2021).

However, by drawing strength from their respective partners, both North and South remain capable, at least on their own terms, of safeguarding their well-being—an important aspect of human mobility. In doing so, they have individually recognized their own social/spatial and existential limitations relative to government health and safety mandate. They divert these limitations (e.g., on mobility, acquiring essential supplies) into opportunities to cultivate their relationships with their respective partners: North finds solace in Allan during his struggles with work-from-home, while South nurtures his love for Alex (and Alex for South) through their joint advocacy efforts for the community. They also drew strength from their inner emotions, aspirations, and personal experiences of the pandemic in their immediate life space. This allowed them to acknowledge their own abilities and functioning. For example, North continued to be the economic provider in his relationship with his partner, while South remained actively involved in advocating for their community with the support of his partner.

The experiences of North and South during the pandemic illustrate a complex interplay of im/mobility, both social/spatial and existential, as articulated by Kronlid (2016). Social mobility refers to physical movement through societal spaces, whereas existential mobility occurs within an "intermediate area between the individual and the environment" and relies on inner capabilities like emotions and imagination to create a meaningful existence (Kronlid, 2016). Confined to their homes due to new work setups or unemployment, they faced a shift in their relationship with social space and community. In this context, the home became their existential space—physically restricted yet a site for introspection, creativity, and resilience. Thus, the home is not merely a place of confinement but a sanctuary where existential mobility unfolds. This means that as external mobility was limited, the narrators turned inward, relying on their emotions, creativity, and internal resources to cope with the challenges of the pandemic, finding ways to sustain a meaningful existence despite the confinement. For example, North turned their bedroom into a workspace, adapting to external limitations while connecting with their personal and emotional needs. South and his partner, meanwhile, joined advocacy groups, staying socially engaged despite being physically confined at home. This shows how existential mobility, through imagination and emotional strength, helps the narrators stay connected and active.

5.0. Conclusion

The pairing of queer bodies and infrastructure is a contested idea, but the personal stories of North and South suggest the potential for discussion around how queer bodies, often marginalized and vulnerable, can be seen as complex infrastructure within the given circumstances, such as the pandemic crisis. This paper, therefore, attempts to offer alternative perspective on how queer bodies can be positioned alongside the discussions of infrastructure and mobility as capability. Through their experiences during the pandemic, North and South illustrate adaptability of queer bodies as shown in their capacity to function based on specific demands and restrictions imposed by state policies. These bodies rendered im/mobile by such policies became agents of care and support, transforming their experiences of isolation into opportunities for deeper connection with their partners and/or community. In this way, they reclaimed their mobility, turning a moment of immobility into a source of capability.

6.0. Limitations of the Findings

The analysis in this paper draws on the selected concepts (body as infrastructure and mobility as capability) and queer textual method; therefore, the interpretations of the narrators' personal stories are suggestive rather than definitive. While these stories carry their own meanings, they do not necessarily represent the broader experiences of all queer or non-queer individuals during the pandemic. This analysis does not aim to compare or contrast these stories with those outside or within the queer community; rather, it focuses on understanding the discussions of mobility and immobility related to queer bodies during the pandemic.

7.0. Practical Value of the Paper

The findings may provide insights for policymakers, community organizations, and other sectors supporting marginalized populations.

8.0. Directions for Future Research

Future research could collect more personal stories from diverse queer identities, using interdisciplinary methods to explore their mobility within broader socio-political and economic contexts.

9.0. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest related to this study.

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