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Philippine Food Security Paradoxies Exposed: Exploring Structural Inequities and Pathways to Sovereignty

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ABSTRACT

This essay critically examines the persistent food security challenges in the Philippines, a nation paradoxically rich in agricultural resources yet plagued by hunger and malnutrition. Through a comprehensive four-part analysis, it systematically unpacks the complex milieus: historical, economic, political—factors shaping this crisis. Part 1 explores the historical and contemporary dynamics driving the hunger for food sovereignty, examining how export-oriented agriculture—driven by global actors, i.e., multinational corporations and international financial—has systematically marginalised small-scale farmers and eroded local food systems. Part 2 leverages Renato and Letizia Constantino's "Distorted Priorities: The Politics of Food" to analyse the historical continuities between colonial and contemporary agricultural policies, while employing Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality to illuminate the regulatory mechanisms perpetuating these inequities. The analysis reveals how cultural imperialism propagated by fast food chains and environmental degradation caused by monoculture farming have further complicated the nation's food security landscape. Part 3 applies Iris Marion Young's "Five Faces of Oppression" framework to systematically

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analyse exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and structural violence within the Philippine food system. Part 4 synthesises these perspectives to examine critical implications for food sovereignty and proposes transformative approaches through food sovereignty principles, genuine agrarian reform, and sustainable agricultural practices. The essay concludes that by addressing structural inequalities and empowering marginalised communities through comprehensive policy reforms and grassroots initiatives, the Philippines can move towards a future where all individuals have access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food, reflecting a commitment to social justice and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Critical Epistemology; Filipino Critical Theory; Critical Studies; Contemporary World Issues; Structural Inequality; SDG2

1. Introduction

The global community has long been striving to address various social, economic, and environmental challenges, leading to the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1945. As a pivotal international organisation, the UN aims to promote peace, security, and cooperation among nations. It has spearheaded numerous initiatives to improve the quality of life for individuals worldwide, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and subsequently the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The UN's SDGs, adopted in 2015, represent a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. These 17 interlinked goals provide a comprehensive framework for addressing the world's most pressing issues. Among them, Goal 2, "Zero Hunger," is particularly critical. It aims to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. This goal is essential not only for eradicating hunger but also for fostering economic growth, social stability, and environmental sustainability.

Despite global efforts, the reality of achieving "Zero Hunger" remains a significant challenge, particularly in developing nations like the Philippines. The country's struggle with food security highlights the complex interplay of various factors, including economic policies, agricultural practices, and international trade dynamics. The Philippines, rich in natural resources and agricultural potential, paradoxically faces persistent food insecurity and malnutrition. This contradiction necessitates a critical examination of the underlying structures and power dynamics that shape the country's food system.

Drawing from the works of Michel Foucault ^[1], we

can explore how power relations, knowledge production, and discursive practices influence the Philippine food system. Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which examines the governance of populations through the regulation of life processes, provides a valuable lens for understanding the intersections of power and food security. Biopolitics, in this context, refers to the ways in which institutions, policies, and practices regulate the production, distribution, and consumption of food, thereby shaping the nutritional status and health outcomes of populations.

2. Literature Review

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) represent one of the most ambitious frameworks for global socio-ecological transformation, with SDG 2 ("Zero Hunger") positioned as a pillar for eradicating poverty, promoting food security, and ensuring sustainable agriculture. However, a burgeoning literature exposes the limits and contradictions of this approach, especially when examined from the vantage point of historically marginalised food-producing countries such as the Philippines. This literature review analyses the strongest current critiques of SDG 2, paying special attention to the literature's engagement (or lack thereof) with the structural and historical roots of food insecurity. It foregrounds the role of multinational corporations (MNCs), international financial institutions (IFIs), cultural imperialism, and environmental degradation in perpetuating hunger, drawing on theoretical frameworks including Foucault's biopolitics and governmentality, Iris Marion Young's Five Faces of Oppression, and the nationalist critique of distorted priorities in food politics advanced by Renato Constantino.

The section is structured thematically, with clear

differentiation between general critiques of the UNSDGs, focused criticisms of SDG 2, structural and historical analyses of Philippine food insecurity, the role of MNCs and IFIs, cultural imperialism, environmental decline, and the marginalisation of smallholder farmers. Special attention is paid to the application of critical frameworks and their utility in assessing the failures and contradictions of SDG 2. The review concludes by synthesizing areas of scholarly consensus, highlighting saturated topics, and delineating the gaps this paper seeks to address—particularly the gap around structural oppression embedded in the configuration of global and local food systems^[2,3]. Additionally, universalistic framings may inadvertently restrict the transformative potential of the goals by reinforcing global inequalities. For instance, SDG 2's targets often demand that the poorest nations make the largest progress in the shortest time^[4], ignoring historical responsibilities and the uneven distribution of resources and capacities.

2.1. General Critiques of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

2.1.1. Structural Limitations, Vagueness, and Non-Binding Nature

A consistent theme in recent scholarship is the structural weakness of the SDGs, including their non-binding status, lack of enforceable accountability, and excessive breadth, which impedes prioritisation and implementation. Critics, argue the SDGs operate more as a set of aspirational ideals than as actionable, rights-based commitments. There are those who forward that the goals' vagueness^[5]—highlighted in statements such as living “in harmony with nature” or “ending poverty in all its forms”—is seen as a product of diplomatic compromise, leading to targets that are so encyclopedic and all-encompassing that “everything is a top priority, which means nothing is a priority”^[4].

The SDGs' voluntary, non-binding nature means that countries are left to design their own implementation strategies, rarely integrating the SDGs into their long-term budgets or policies. An analysis of 74 countries revealed that only 13 reflected the SDGs in budget lines, highlighting a pronounced disconnect between rhetorical commitments and structural change^[4]. This “accountability vacuum” is a notable source of distrust and inertia at both national and

international levels.

2.1.2. Trade-Offs, Policy Fragmentation, and the Problem of Universality

The literature also critiques the SDGs for insufficiently addressing the trade-offs and policy fragmentation inherent in trying to advance 17 interdependent goals simultaneously. This results in sector-specific approaches which often obscure the profound synergies and contradictions between objectives such as economic growth and environmental sustainability^[6].

2.1.3. Data Manipulation and Political Vulnerability

A recurring concern is the susceptibility of SDG-related monitoring to political interference and data manipulation—exemplified in the evolution of hunger metrics, which may be adjusted to meet administrative priorities or minimise the appearance of stagnation^[4]. The risk that governments and international agencies game the metrics is sharpened by weak independent oversight and the strategic use of “success stories” by powerful actors in the global system.

2.2. Critiques of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger)

2.2.1. Productivist Bias and the Historicism of Development

SDG 2 is critiqued for its productivist orientation, which echoes the modernist and Eurocentric logic of the Green Revolution: that hunger is primarily a technical challenge of insufficient production, rather than a complex result of entrenched social, political, and economic structures^[7]. Further commentaries^[8] even establish how this narrative is propelled by naive trust to institutions, just simply by offering a small portion of progress, creating a sense of dependence and debt of gratitude from the constituents. No wonder why the question of decolonisation keeps on surfacing^[9], for institutions that espouse Eurocentric discourses propels, not progress, but colonial mindset and dependence in spite of the supposed end of colonisation a century ago. This focus leads to “solutions” reliant on market expansion, biotechnological fixes, and increased

yields—failing to address the entrenched inequalities and dependencies of the Global South, and marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems.

The SDG 2 framework also carries historical legacies of colonialism and modernisation, framing the Global South as perpetually lacking—awaiting intervention via Western science, capital, or models of agricultural modernisation^[10,11].

2.2.2. Failure to Address Structural and Historical Roots

Recent global assessments confirm that SDG 2 has made limited progress, with the number of people facing hunger and malnutrition rising sharply since 2020—reversing hard-won gains from previous decades. However, the mainstream SDG discourse remains silent on the structural roots of food insecurity, including historical land dispossession, unequal trade regimes, labor exploitations, and class/caste/racial divisions^[2]. SDG 2 tends to naturalise market-led solutions (e.g., increased trade liberalisation or investment in value chains) and frame hunger as a result of technical deficiencies, while expert reports highlight the inadequacy of these approaches in settings defined by chronic poverty, climate vulnerability, and social exclusion.

2.2.3. Neoliberalism and the Entrenchment of Corporate Power

A robust segment of scholarship frames SDG 2 as wedded to a neoliberal paradigm, i.e., prioritizing market-driven agricultural intensification and external investment. This orientation, critics contend, perpetuates the dominance of multinational agribusiness and fortifies structures of global inequality and food dependency, undermining the chances of equitable or sustainable development^[7].

2.3. Marginalisation of Small-Scale Farmers in Global and Local Food Systems

2.3.1. Structural Exclusion, Power Imbalances, and Regressive Value Chains

Smallholder and peasant farmers provide the major-

ity of food in the Global South and represent a significant proportion of the rural poor. Literature consistently documents their systemic exclusion from policy processes, infrastructure investment, modern financial services, and productive assets. Global value chains, oriented around export-oriented and vertically integrated production, routinely reinforce these power imbalances, with price volatility and market concentration exacerbating smallholder precarity^[12]. This marginalisation is further intensified by discriminatory norms around gender, ethnicity, and class, limiting access to land, credit, and extension services for women and other marginalised groups.

2.3.2. Theoretical Frameworks: Oppression, Biopolitics, and Governmentality

Application of Young's Five Faces of Oppression de-/con-notes how the marginalisation of smallholders is shown to be both material (in profitability and risk) and symbolic (through the erasure of their role in agricultural development, their sovereignty, and their voice in decision-making)^[13]. The literature demonstrates that this oppression is structural, not merely the product of individual malice, but of the policies, institutions, and economic logics that persistently privilege large-scale, capital-intensive, export-oriented agriculture. Meanwhile, Foucault's biopolitics and governmentality frameworks enable scholars to map the ways in which food governance operates via technologies of power that discipline bodies, populations, dietary norms, and landscapes—not solely through repression but through productive and normalizing interventions^[14]. This observation goes consistently with recent accounts that underscore how SDG 2, in its focus on population nutrition, productivity metrics, and market integration, reproduces a biopolitical logic that orders life, health, and death according to utilitarian rationality, often to the detriment of marginalised populations.

2.4. Constantino's Critique of Distorted Priorities in Food Politics

Nationalist Historiography and Counter-Consciousness

Renato Constantino, the Philippine scholar, advanced a “historically-informed social criticism” that centers the

public dimension of intellectual work and the necessity of counter-consciousness to challenge the neocolonial status quo. Constantino's critique focuses on the distorted priorities of the postcolonial state—prioritizing production (especially of exports and domestic staples for elite consumption) over the needs and agency of the majority of food-insecure Filipinos^[15]. This furtherance goes in consonance to what the premise of this paper upholds: that the misalignment between policymaking and the lived realities of food producers and consumers, emphasising how policies are frequently crafted in the interests of landed gentry, capitalist corporations, or international funders, rather than poor and working-class Filipinos^[16]. In this account, food sovereignty and popular participation in policy decisions are seen as necessary correctives to elitism, dependency, and the reproduction of colonial and neocolonial hierarchies.

2.5. Synthesis: The Story and Areas for Investigation so far

The literature displays broad consensus on several points while also revealing important research gaps: scholars agree that the SDGs, and SDG 2 in particular, are overly broad, non-binding, and lack the political will required for deep structural transformation; market-driven, productivist, and export-oriented approaches to hunger are therefore insufficient and often counterproductive when they ignore structural inequalities, cultural difference, and ecological limits; corporate and international financial institution influence in food-systems governance routinely undermines accountability, privileges large-scale agribusiness, and further marginalises smallholders and local communities; environmental degradation driven by industrial agriculture and corporate land policies intensifies hunger, climate risk, and rural dispossession; and food sovereignty, while not a panacea, is widely seen as a more holistic, rights-based alternative that centers local agency, agro-ecological sustainability, and social justice.

Yet notable gaps persist that future work must address: there is little scholarship that systematically integrates complementary theoretical lenses e.g., Foucault's biopolitics and governmentality, Young's five faces of oppression, and Constantino's critique of distorted priorities. A unified analysis of food systems in the Global South;

many SDG critiques remain fixated on metrics, technical interventions, or policy design and therefore under-theorise the lived structures of oppression formed and reproduced by overlapping global, national, and local power relations; the mechanisms of cultural imperialism, such as the privileging of Northern diets, epistemic hierarchies, and market logics.

All these require deeper, contextually specific study as forms of epistemic violence and exclusion; much research is insufficiently attentive to national and regional histories of colonialism, neocolonialism, and resistance (as the Philippine case exemplifies); critiques of “multi-stakeholder” and “participatory” governance models show these often function as technocratic depoliticisation lacking genuine accountability to marginalised communities; and there is a shortage of work that interweaves food justice, intersectionality, and locally grounded strategies for dismantling place-specific forms of oppression embedded within broader food-system dynamics.

3. Methodology

This paper employs a critical theoretical analysis to examine the paradox of food security in the Philippines, grounding its research methodology in three primary theoretical frameworks. The first framework utilises historical-critical analysis, based primarily on Constantino and Constantino's (1988) “Distorted Priorities: The Politics of Food,” focusing on historical continuities between colonial and contemporary agricultural policies and analyzing power relations in agricultural development. The second framework applies Foucauldian analysis, particularly the concepts of biopolitics and governmentality, to examine regulatory mechanisms in food systems and power relations between international institutions and local governance. The third framework employs critical social theory, specifically the “Five Faces of Oppression”^[17] framework, to systematically analyse exploitation in agricultural systems, marginalisation of small-scale farmers, powerlessness in policy-making, cultural imperialism in food systems, and structural violence in agricultural practices.

The research approach encompasses three main components: document analysis, critical policy analysis, and structural analysis. Document analysis involves reviewing

historical agricultural policies, international trade agreements, structural adjustment programs, and food security indicators. Critical policy analysis examines agricultural development policies, trade liberalisation measures, food security programs, and international financial institution policies. Structural analysis investigates power relations in agricultural systems, economic dependencies, institutional frameworks, and cultural impacts.

The analytical framework proceeds through three distinct levels: macro, meso, and micro. The macro level examines international trade dynamics, global economic policies, and multinational corporate influence. The meso-level focuses on national agricultural policies, institutional frameworks, and market structures. The micro level analyses local farming communities, individual farmer experiences, and community food security.

The study acknowledges several methodological limitations, including reliance on secondary sources and theoretical frameworks, limited primary data from affected communities, focus on structural analysis over empirical measurement, temporal constraints in historical analysis, and geographic limitations in case examples. The research addresses three primary questions: How do historical colonial structures continue to influence contemporary food security in the Philippines? What role do international financial institutions and multinational corporations play in shaping agricultural policies and practices? How do various forms of oppression manifest in the Philippine food system, and what are their implications for food sovereignty? This methodological framework enables a comprehensive analysis of the complex interplay between historical, economic, political, and cultural factors that shape food security in the Philippines, while acknowledging the limitations inherent in such a theoretical approach.

4. Findings and Results

4.1. Off to the Narrow Path: The Hunger for Food Sovereignty in the Country

The Philippines' food security challenges can be traced back to historical and contemporary power dynamics that prioritise export-oriented agriculture over local food production. This shift, driven by international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund

(IMF) and the World Bank, has led to the liberalisation of agricultural policies and the promotion of cash crops for export. While this approach has generated revenue for the country, it has also marginalised small-scale farmers, disrupted local food systems, and exacerbated economic disparities.

Export-oriented agriculture, often controlled by multinational corporations (MNCs), has significant implications for the Philippines' food sovereignty. The dominance of MNCs in sectors such as banana, pineapple, and coconut production underscores the unequal power relations between local farmers and global agribusinesses. These corporations dictate the terms of production, pricing, and distribution, leaving small farmers with little control over their livelihoods. The contract-growing system, for instance, binds local farmers to agreements that prioritise corporate interests over community needs, leading to indebtedness and land dispossession.

Moreover, the liberalisation of trade policies, as mandated by structural adjustment programs (SAPs), has opened the Philippine market to an influx of imported food products. While intended to stabilise food prices and ensure availability, these policies have undermined local producers and eroded food self-sufficiency. The dependency on imported food items such as rice, meat, and dairy products has created a paradox where a country capable of producing sufficient food for its population relies heavily on foreign imports.

Foucault's concept of governmentality, which refers to the art of governing beyond the state's apparatus, is relevant in examining how international financial institutions and trade agreements shape national food policies. Governmentality encompasses the various techniques and strategies employed by institutions to manage and regulate populations. In the context of the Philippines, governmentality is evident in the IMF and World Bank's influence over national agricultural policies. These institutions' conditionalities, often attached to loans and financial aid, compel the Philippine government to adopt neoliberal policies that prioritise market efficiency over social equity and environmental sustainability.

The impact of these policies is further compounded by the proliferation of fast food chains and the increasing consumption of processed foods. American transnational

corporations such as McDonald's, Shakey's, and Kentucky Fried Chicken have significantly altered Filipino dietary habits, promoting a Westernised lifestyle that prioritises convenience and consumerism. The aggressive marketing strategies of these corporations target the middle class and youth, establishing a strong consumer base for fast food products. This shift in dietary patterns has profound health implications, with rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases among the population.

The economic implications of the fast food industry are also noteworthy. The franchise model employed by these transnational corporations necessitates substantial imports of equipment, raw materials, and training, resulting in a significant drain on the pound sterling. This economic dynamic not only depletes local currency reserves but also discourages the development of homegrown fast food businesses, perpetuating a colonial mentality that equates foreign brands with superior quality.

The intersection of biopolitics and governmentality in the Philippine food system reveals the intricate web of power relations that shape food security outcomes. The prioritisation of export-oriented agriculture, the influence of international financial institutions, and the dominance of transnational corporations collectively contribute to a food system that marginalises local producers and compromises national food sovereignty.

To address these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a holistic approach that reclaims food sovereignty and prioritises the needs of local communities. This involves implementing genuine agrarian reform that redistributes land to small farmers, promoting sustainable agricultural practices that enhance local food production, and regulating the influence of multinational corporations in the food sector. Additionally, it is crucial to foster a cultural shift that values local food traditions and encourages healthy eating habits.

The UN's SDG 2, "Zero Hunger," provides a critical framework for addressing these issues. Achieving this goal requires a concerted effort to dismantle the power structures that perpetuate food insecurity and to build a more equitable and sustainable food system. By embracing the principles of food sovereignty, the Philippines can move towards a future where all individuals have access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food.

4.2. Since Then and Back Again: Food Security/Sovereignty in the Country (or if There Is)

The conundrum of food security in the Philippines is deeply intertwined with the country's complex history of colonialism, its current economic policies, and the pervasive influence of multinational corporations. The persistent challenge of achieving food security, despite the Philippines' rich natural resources and agricultural potential, highlights a profound contradiction. This contradiction demands an in-depth examination of the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate food insecurity and malnutrition. Constantino and Constantino's *Distorted Priorities: The Politics of Food* provides a crucial lens through which we can understand these dynamics and the urgent need for a paradigm shift in food and agricultural policies^[16].

The Philippines has long been subject to external influences that have shaped its economic and agricultural policies. Historically, colonial powers imposed agricultural systems that prioritised the production of export crops over subsistence farming. This legacy continues to influence the country's agricultural policies, which are often geared towards producing cash crops for the global market rather than ensuring food self-sufficiency. This shift towards export-oriented agriculture has been driven by international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, which have advocated for the liberalisation of agricultural policies and the integration of the Philippines into the global economy^[16].

Export-oriented agriculture has profound implications for the Philippines' food sovereignty. Multinational corporations dominate key sectors such as banana, pineapple, and coconut production, exerting significant control over the terms of production, pricing, and distribution. This concentration of power in the hands of a few global agribusinesses leaves local farmers with little autonomy over their livelihoods. For instance, the contract-growing system binds local farmers to agreements that prioritise corporate interests over community needs, leading to indebtedness and land dispossession. These power dynamics underscore the unequal relations between local farmers and multinational corporations, which are emblematic of broader structural inequalities within the global food system^[16].

The liberalisation of trade policies, as mandated by structural adjustment programs (SAPs), has further exacerbated the food security challenges in the Philippines. While these policies were intended to stabilise food prices and ensure availability, they have often undermined local producers and eroded food self-sufficiency. The influx of imported food items such as rice, meat, and dairy products has created a paradox where a country capable of producing sufficient food for its population relies heavily on foreign imports. This dependency on imported food items not only disrupts local markets but also exposes the country to global market fluctuations, which can lead to food crises^[16].

The IMF and World Bank's influence over national agricultural policies is a clear example of Foucault's concept of governmentality, which refers to the art of governing beyond the state's apparatus. Governmentality encompasses the various techniques and strategies employed by institutions to manage and regulate populations. In the context of the Philippines, governmentality is evident in the conditionalities imposed by the IMF and World Bank, which compel the Philippine government to adopt neoliberal policies that prioritise market efficiency over social equity and environmental sustainability. These policies often benefit multinational corporations and global agribusinesses at the expense of local farmers and communities^[18].

The impact of neoliberal policies on the Philippines' agricultural sector is further compounded by the proliferation of fast food chains and the increasing consumption of processed foods. American transnational corporations such as McDonald's, Shakey's, and Kentucky Fried Chicken have significantly altered Filipino dietary habits, promoting a Westernised lifestyle that prioritises convenience and consumerism. The aggressive marketing strategies of these corporations target the middle class and youth, establishing a strong consumer base for fast food products. This shift in dietary patterns has profound health implications, with rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases among the population^[16].

The economic implications of the fast food industry are also noteworthy. The franchise model employed by these transnational corporations necessitates substantial imports of equipment, raw materials, and training, resulting in a significant dollar drain. This economic dynamic not only depletes local currency reserves but also discour-

ages the development of homegrown fast food businesses, perpetuating a colonial mentality that equates foreign brands with superior quality. The dominance of these corporations in the food sector highlights the pervasive influence of multinational corporations on the Philippine economy and underscores the need for a reevaluation of food consumption patterns and support for local industries^[16].

The intersection of biopolitics and governmentality in the Philippine food system reveals the intricate web of power relations that shape food security outcomes. The prioritisation of export-oriented agriculture, the influence of international financial institutions, and the dominance of transnational corporations collectively contribute to a food system that marginalises local producers and compromises national food sovereignty. To address these challenges, it is imperative to adopt a holistic approach that reclaims food sovereignty and prioritises the needs of local communities^[1].

Reclaiming food sovereignty involves implementing genuine agrarian reform that redistributes land to small farmers and promotes sustainable agricultural practices that enhance local food production. Agrarian reform is crucial for addressing the historical and structural inequalities that have marginalised small farmers and concentrated land ownership in the hands of a few elites. This requires a comprehensive policy framework that supports small farmers through access to credit, infrastructure, and technology, and that prioritises food production for local consumption over export-oriented agriculture^[16].

Additionally, it is essential to regulate the influence of multinational corporations in the food sector. This includes implementing policies that protect local producers from unfair competition, promoting local food industries, and encouraging the development of homegrown fast food businesses. By fostering a cultural shift that values local food traditions and encourages healthy eating habits, the Philippines can move towards a more equitable and sustainable food system. This cultural shift is crucial for addressing the health implications of the proliferation of fast food chains and the increasing consumption of processed foods^[16].

The UN's SDG 2, "Zero Hunger," provides a critical framework for addressing these issues. Achieving this goal requires a concerted effort to dismantle the power struc-

tures that perpetuate food insecurity and to build a more equitable and sustainable food system. By embracing the principles of food sovereignty, the Philippines can move towards a future where all individuals have access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food^[19].

In examining the Philippines' food security crisis through the lens of Constantino and Constantino's work, it becomes evident that the issues are deeply rooted in historical and contemporary power dynamics. The prioritisation of export-oriented agriculture, the influence of international financial institutions, and the dominance of multinational corporations collectively contribute to a food system that marginalises local producers and compromises national food sovereignty. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that reclaims food sovereignty, prioritises the needs of local communities, and promotes sustainable agricultural practices.

The Philippines' history of colonialism has left a lasting impact on its agricultural policies and practices. The imposition of colonial agricultural systems that prioritised export crops over subsistence farming has created a legacy of dependency on foreign markets and multinational corporations. This legacy continues to influence the country's agricultural policies, which are often geared towards producing cash crops for the global market rather than ensuring food self-sufficiency. The liberalisation of agricultural policies and the integration of the Philippines into the global economy, as advocated by international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, have further entrenched this dependency^[16].

The dominance of multinational corporations in key sectors such as banana, pineapple, and coconut production underscores the unequal power relations between local farmers and global agribusinesses. These corporations exert significant control over the terms of production, pricing, and distribution, leaving small farmers with little autonomy over their livelihoods. The contract-growing system, for instance, binds local farmers to agreements that prioritise corporate interests over community needs, leading to indebtedness and land dispossession. These power dynamics are emblematic of broader structural inequalities within the global food system, where the interests of multinational corporations often take precedence over the nutritional priority.

It goes without saying that the analysis of food security in the Philippines, based on the works of Renato and Letizia Constantino, reveals a complex interplay of historical, economic, and political factors that have shaped the nation's agricultural landscape. The legacy of colonialism, perpetuated through modern economic policies and practices, continues to cast a long shadow over the Philippines. Export-oriented agriculture, driven by multinational corporations and international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, has prioritised cash crops for foreign markets over local food production. This focus has marginalised small-scale farmers, eroded local food systems, and entrenched economic disparities. The liberalisation of trade policies, a cornerstone of neoliberal economic reforms, has further exacerbated these challenges by flooding the market with imported food products, undermining local producers and increasing dependency on foreign imports. Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality provide a critical lens for understanding these dynamics, as they reveal how power relations and governance structures regulate the production, distribution, and consumption of food, shaping the nutritional status and health outcomes of the population.

Transitioning to Iris Marion Young's framework, we can further dissect the structural inequalities and power dynamics within the Philippine food system. Young's "Five Faces of Oppression"—exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence—offer a comprehensive lens through which to analyse the multifaceted oppression faced by small-scale farmers and rural communities. Exploitation is evident in the transfer of labor benefits from local farmers to multinational corporations, while marginalisation highlights the systemic exclusion of these farmers from meaningful participation in economic life. Powerlessness is reflected in the inability of local communities to influence policy decisions due to the dominance of international financial institutions and multinational corporations. Cultural imperialism is exemplified by the proliferation of fast food chains that promote a Westernised lifestyle, undermining traditional food practices and contributing to health issues. Lastly, structural violence is evident in the policies and practices that perpetuate food insecurity and environmental degradation. By integrating Young's framework with Constantino and

Constantino's analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of the interconnected issues that underpin the food security crisis in the Philippines and the need for a transformative approach that prioritises food sovereignty, sustainable agricultural practices, and social justice.

4.3. Young's Lenses on this Old Issue: Paradox and Politics in the Pockets of National Stomach

The critique offered by Renato Constantino and Letizia R. Constantino in their seminal work *Distorted Priorities: The Politics of Food* lays bare the deep-seated issues within the Philippine food system. The power dynamics, economic policies, and cultural shifts that have shaped the nation's agricultural landscape are critically examined, revealing a system that prioritises export-oriented agriculture at the expense of local food security. To further understand and expand upon this problematisation, we can apply the theoretical framework of Iris Marion Young, a prominent political theorist known for her work on social justice and structural oppression.

Young's Five Faces of Oppression

In her influential essay "The Five Faces of Oppression," Young outlines five forms of structural oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence (Young 1990). This framework provides a valuable lens for analyzing the Philippine food system, as it allows us to deconstruct the various ways in which power and inequality are perpetuated within the agricultural sector.

• Exploitation

Exploitation, as defined by Young, refers to the transfer of the results of labor from one group to benefit another [17]. In the context of the Philippine food system, exploitation is evident in the relationship between multinational corporations (MNCs) and local farmers. The control exerted by MNCs over key agricultural sectors such as banana, pineapple, and coconut production ensures that the profits generated from these industries are funneled to corporate shareholders, often at the expense of the local farming communities. These corporations dictate the terms of production, pricing, and distribution, leaving small-scale farmers with little control over their

livelihoods. The contract-growing system, for example, binds local farmers to agreements that prioritise corporate interests over community needs, leading to indebtedness and land dispossession [16].

• Marginalisation

Marginalisation involves the systematic exclusion of certain groups from meaningful participation in social, economic, and political life [17]. In the Philippines, small-scale farmers and rural communities are marginalised within the broader economic and political landscape. The prioritisation of export-oriented agriculture, driven by international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, has marginalised local food production and the needs of small farmers. The liberalisation of trade policies and the influx of imported food products have further exacerbated this marginalisation, creating a competitive environment that local producers struggle to navigate. This has led to the erosion of local food systems and increased dependency on imported food items [16].

• Powerlessness

Powerlessness refers to the inability to influence decision-making processes that affect one's life [17]. In the Philippine food system, small-scale farmers and rural communities experience powerlessness in multiple ways. The dominance of multinational corporations and the influence of international financial institutions in shaping agricultural policies leave little room for local farmers to assert their interests. The conditionalities imposed by the IMF and World Bank, which prioritise neoliberal policies and market efficiency, undermine the ability of local communities to influence policy decisions that directly impact their livelihoods [16]. This powerlessness is further compounded by the lack of access to resources, credit, and infrastructure that would enable small farmers to invest in sustainable agricultural practices and improve their productivity.

• Cultural Imperialism

Cultural imperialism involves the dominance of one group's cultural norms and values over another, often leading to the marginalisation and devaluation of the latter's cultural practices [17]. The proliferation of fast food chains in the Philippines exemplifies cultural imperialism, as American transnational corporations such as McDonald's, Shakey's, and Kentucky Fried Chicken have significantly influenced Filipino dietary habits. The aggressive mar-

ketting strategies of these corporations, which target the middle class and youth, promote a Westernised lifestyle that prioritises convenience and consumerism. This shift in dietary patterns not only undermines traditional food practices but also has profound health implications, with rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases among the population^[16].

- **Violence**

Violence, as outlined by Young, refers to the systemic and institutionalised harm inflicted on certain groups^[17]. In the context of the Philippine food system, violence can be understood as the structural violence that arises from policies and practices that perpetuate food insecurity and economic inequality. The prioritisation of export-oriented agriculture and the influence of multinational corporations create a system where access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food is limited, perpetuating cycles of poverty and malnutrition. This structural violence is compounded by environmental degradation resulting from monoculture farming and the widespread use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, which harm both the environment and the health of farming communities^[16].

5. Now, What?: The Critical and Lingering Implications of the Hunger for Food Sovereignty

5.1. Revisiting Exploitation and Economic Inequality

Exploitation within the Philippine food system is a clear manifestation of economic inequality. The benefits of agricultural production are disproportionately reaped by multinational corporations, while small-scale farmers bear the brunt of the economic burden. This exploitation is not merely a result of market dynamics but is deeply entrenched in the structures of global capitalism. The contract-growing system exemplifies this exploitation, as farmers are coerced into agreements that prioritise corporate profits over their own livelihoods. These agreements often involve unfavorable terms, such as low prices for produce and high costs for inputs, leading to a cycle of indebtedness and land dispossession^[16].

5.2. Marginalisation and the Erosion of Local Food Systems

Marginalisation within the Philippine food system is both a cause and consequence of the prioritisation of export-oriented agriculture. The focus on cash crops for export has led to the neglect of local food production, exacerbating food insecurity and malnutrition. The liberalisation of trade policies, driven by international financial institutions, has further marginalised small-scale farmers by flooding the market with imported food products. This competitive environment makes it difficult for local producers to thrive, leading to the erosion of local food systems and increased dependency on imports^[16].

The marginalisation of small-scale farmers is also evident in the lack of access to resources, credit, and infrastructure. Many farmers are unable to invest in sustainable agricultural practises or improve their productivity due to the absence of necessary support. This marginalisation is further compounded by the powerlessness experienced by these communities, as they have little influence over the decision-making processes that shape agricultural policies^[16].

5.3. Powerlessness and the Influence of International Financial Institutions

The powerlessness experienced by small-scale farmers and rural communities in the Philippines is a direct result of the dominance of multinational corporations and the influence of international financial institutions. The conditionalities imposed by the IMF and World Bank, which prioritise neoliberal policies and market efficiency, undermine the ability of local communities to influence policy decisions that directly impact their livelihoods. These conditionalities often involve the removal of subsidies on fertilisers, the end of cheap credit and low irrigation fees, and the dismantling of price controls, all of which increase production costs for farmers and reduce their competitiveness^[16].

The influence of international financial institutions extends beyond economic policies to include cultural imperialism. The promotion of genetically modified seeds and other agricultural inputs by multinational corporations, often supported by international financial institutions, has led to the displacement of traditional seed varieties. This

“genetic imperialism” not only exacerbates economic disparities but also threatens biodiversity and the resilience of local food systems^[16].

5.4. Cultural Imperialism and the Proliferation of Fast Food Chains

The proliferation of fast food chains in the Philippines is a vivid example of cultural imperialism. American transnational corporations such as McDonald’s, Shakey’s, and Kentucky Fried Chicken have significantly influenced Filipino dietary habits, promoting a Westernised lifestyle that prioritises convenience and consumerism. The aggressive marketing strategies of these corporations, which target the middle class and youth, have established a strong consumer base for fast food products. This shift in dietary patterns not only undermines traditional food practices but also has profound health implications, with rising rates of obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases among the population^[16].

The economic impact of the fast food industry is equally significant. The franchise model employed by these transnational corporations necessitates substantial imports of equipment, raw materials, and training, resulting in a significant dollar drain. This economic dynamic not only depletes local currency reserves but also discourages the development of homegrown fast food businesses. The brand name craze and societal perception that foreign fast food chains are superior to local options exacerbate these issues, reinforcing a colonial mentality that equates foreign brands with superior quality^[16].

5.5. Structural Violence and Environmental Degradation

Structural violence within the Philippine food system is manifested in the policies and practices that perpetuate food insecurity and economic inequality. The prioritisation of export-oriented agriculture and the influence of multi-national corporations create a system where access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food is limited, perpetuating cycles of poverty and malnutrition. This structural violence is compounded by structural violence that arises from monoculture farming and the widespread use of chemical pesticides and fertilisers, which harm both

the environment and the health of farming communities^[16]. Monoculture farming depletes soil nutrients and increases susceptibility to pests and diseases, leading to a vicious cycle of chemical dependency. This not only endangers the environment but also exacerbates the health risks for communities exposed to these harmful chemicals.

To address these interlinked challenges, it is crucial to promote sustainable agricultural practices that enhance biodiversity, improve soil health, and reduce dependence on chemical inputs. Agro-ecology, which integrates ecological principles into farming practices, offers a promising alternative to the current agricultural model. By fostering biodiversity, enhancing soil fertility, and improving resilience to climate change, agro-ecological practices can help create a more sustainable and equitable food system. Government support in the form of research, education, and infrastructure is essential for scaling up these practices and ensuring their widespread adoption^[16].

What best illustrates this situation? None other than the most recent concerns on the Farm-to-Market inequalities revealed by issues of corruption, which think requires another full-length paper to illucidate. Undeniably, structural violence in the Philippine food system shows up in toxic agronomy, broken logistics, and policy choices that privilege exports over local food security; fixing this requires investing in agro-ecology, transparent farm-to-market infrastructure, and value-chain support for smallholders. This structural violence as a set of policy and practice choices that channel harm into rural communities.

That harm is visible in the widespread use of pesticides and fertilisers tied to monoculture systems: official monitoring and sector reports document ongoing pesticide regulation and use that create health and environmental risks for farming communities, reinforcing dependency on chemical inputs and undermining long-term soil health^[20]. This chemical dependency is a direct mechanism by which structural violence converts short-term productivity into long-term vulnerability for smallholders. This proves how logistics and governance failures compound agronomic harms. Recent investigations and hearings have exposed systemic overpricing and mismanagement of farm-to-market road (FMR) projects, with audits and reporting showing projects inflated by large margins and funds diverted away from the communities they were meant to serve

^[21]. When roads meant to connect farms to markets are overpriced, delayed, or poorly built, farmers face higher transport costs, spoilage, and reduced bargaining power—practical barriers that translate into lower incomes and less access to nutritious food for local consumers.

In brief, thus, the structural violence described is materially expressed as follows: pesticide dependence, overpriced and dysfunctional farm-to-market infrastructure, and value-chain exclusion; reversing it means aligning infrastructure spending, regulatory oversight, and agro-ecological support to restore both farmer livelihoods and local food security ^[20].

5.6. Empowering Marginalised Communities

The remedy suggested, viz., agro-ecology plus public support, while being piloted in policy and program work, still proves wanting. The Department of Agriculture and international partners are promoting climate-resilient and ecological approaches, and FAO programs in the Philippines emphasise systems-oriented interventions that link production, nutrition, and environment. Scaling these approaches will require transparent investment in FMRs, post-harvest facilities, farmer education, and value-chain finance so that agro-ecological producers can reach markets without being undercut by structural corruption or infrastructure failure ^[22].

That is why, in order to combat the various forms of oppression identified by Young, it is essential to empower marginalised communities through genuine agrarian reform and inclusive policy-making. Agrarian reform must go beyond mere land redistribution to include comprehensive support for small farmers, such as access to credit, infrastructure, and technical assistance. By empowering small farmers and ensuring their participation in decision-making processes, the Philippines can create a more equitable and just food system that prioritises the needs of local communities over corporate profits ^[16]—all addressing these contemporary civilisational discontents ^[23].

6. Conclusions

6.1. Who's Hungry? Who's Hunger?

Analyzing the problematisation of the Philippine

food system through the lens of Iris Young's Five Faces of Oppression provides a comprehensive understanding of the structural inequalities and power dynamics at play. The exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and structural violence that permeate the food system highlight the urgent need for a transformative approach to food security. By addressing these underlying issues and prioritizing food sovereignty, the Philippines can work towards a future where all individuals have access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. This transformation requires a concerted effort from the government, civil society, and the international community to dismantle the power structures that perpetuate food insecurity and build a more equitable and sustainable food system ^[16]. By applying Young's framework to Constantino and Constantino's analysis, we gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted oppression within the Philippine food system. This critical perspective allows us to deconstruct the power dynamics and structural inequalities that contribute to food insecurity and marginalisation. It also highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing these issues, one that prioritises social justice and empowers marginalised communities.

As we draw our examination of the Philippine food security conundrum to a close, it is imperative to reflect on the intricate tapestry of historical, economic, and political threads that have woven together to create this complex scenario. The narrative is one of paradoxes and contradictions, where a nation rich in agricultural potential is mired in persistent food insecurity and malnutrition. To fully appreciate the gravity of this issue, we must consider not only the empirical data and structural frameworks but also the lived experiences and aspirations of the Filipino people. The Philippines' struggle with food security is emblematic of broader global trends, where neoliberal economic policies, multinational corporate dominance, and international financial institutions impose a model of development that often undermines local needs and sovereignty. This is not merely an academic exercise; it is a reality that affects millions of lives. It is about the small-scale farmer in Mindanao who struggles to make ends meet under the oppressive weight of corporate contracts. It is about the children in Manila who grow up consuming more fast food than traditional, nutritious meals. It is about the land and sea, contin-

uously exploited and degraded, leaving future generations to inherit a landscape of diminished possibilities.

The legacy of colonialism, perpetuated through modern economic policies and practices, continues to cast a long shadow over the Philippines. Export-oriented agriculture, a remnant of colonial extraction, remains a central pillar of the economy, prioritizing cash crops for foreign markets over local food production. This focus has entrenched economic disparities, marginalised small-scale farmers, and compromised food sovereignty. Multinational corporations, with their vast resources and influence, dictate the terms of production, leaving little room for local agency and empowerment.

The liberalisation of trade policies, a cornerstone of neoliberal economic reforms, has further exacerbated these challenges. The influx of imported food products, while ostensibly aimed at stabilizing prices and ensuring availability, has undermined local producers and eroded self-sufficiency. The result is a paradoxical situation where a country capable of producing sufficient food for its population relies heavily on foreign imports, leaving it vulnerable to global supply chain disruptions. This dependency is not just an economic issue; it is a matter of national security and sovereignty.

Foucault's concepts of biopolitics and governmentality provide a critical lens through which to view these dynamics. Biopolitics, the regulation of populations through policies and practices that influence life processes, is evident in the ways international financial institutions and multinational corporations shape the Philippine food system. Governmentality, the art of governing beyond the state's traditional apparatus, manifests in the conditionalities attached to loans and financial aid, compelling the Philippine government to adopt neoliberal policies that prioritise market efficiency over social equity and environmental sustainability.

But while these theoretical frameworks offer valuable insights, they must not overshadow the human element of this narrative. The lived experiences of Filipino farmers, consumers, and communities are the heart of this issue. It is their resilience, creativity, and determination that offer the most potent counter-narratives to the dominant discourse of exploitation and marginalisation. It is in their stories that we find the seeds of resistance and the po-

tential for transformative change.

6.2. The Implications and Embedded Recommendations

For the contemporary Filipino reader, this issue is not an abstract problem but a tangible reality that affects daily life. The food on their table, the health of their family, and the future of their children are all intertwined with the dynamics we have explored. The challenge, then, is to translate this understanding into action. It is to question and challenge the status quo, to advocate for policies that prioritise local needs and sustainability, and to support initiatives that empower marginalised communities. The concept of food sovereignty offers a powerful framework for this transformative agenda. Food sovereignty emphasises the right of peoples to define their own food systems, prioritizing local food production and consumption over global trade. It calls for genuine agrarian reform, sustainable agricultural practices, and the regulation of multinational corporations. It demands a shift from a model of development that exploits and extracts to one that nurtures and sustains. Achieving food sovereignty in the Philippines requires a comprehensive and coordinated effort. It involves implementing policies that redistribute land to small farmers, support sustainable agricultural practices, and regulate the influence of multinational corporations. It also requires fostering a cultural shift that values local food traditions and healthy eating habits. Public awareness campaigns, educational programs, and community initiatives can play a crucial role in this regard.

Moreover, this effort must be underpinned by a commitment to social justice. The systemic inequalities and power imbalances that underpin the food security crisis must be addressed head-on. This means challenging the dominance of multinational corporations, advocating for fair trade practices, and supporting the rights of small-scale farmers and rural communities. It means recognizing the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental issues and addressing them in an integrated and holistic manner.

For the contemporary Filipino reader, this is a call to action. It is an invitation to be part of a movement for change, to advocate for policies that prioritise the needs of local communities, and to support initiatives that promote

food sovereignty. It is a reminder that the fight for food security is not just about ensuring access to food but about building a more just, equitable, and sustainable society.

In conclusion, the Philippine food security conundrum is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive and critical approach to address. By examining the problem through the lens of Constantino and Constantino's analysis (1988) and incorporating Iris Young's framework of oppression, we gain a deeper understanding of the structural inequalities and power dynamics at play. The challenge now is to translate this understanding into action. By advocating for food sovereignty, supporting sustainable agricultural practices, and empowering marginalised communities, the Philippines can move towards a future where all individuals have access to nutritious, affordable, and culturally appropriate food. This is not just a policy imperative but a moral and ethical one, reflecting the values of justice, equity, and sustainability that must guide our collective efforts. Needless to say, but, in one way or the other, the problems that R. Constantino and L. R. Constantino^[16] spelled out decades ago either serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy in the contemporary Philippine scene or a fully blossoming problem exacerbated, ironically, by the greatest and largest organisation, whose goal is to eradicate hunger found wanting more. Harkening to all these, we trust, that the true visions globalisation [23–27], applied in real world, to real people, in real situations can be achieved: a glocal community that prospers together and rises up together.

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