

Narrator: Christie Bernados

Interviewer: Isabel Carlin

Interview date: 27 February, 2021

Transcribed by: Isabel Carlin

Christie Bernados Interview

Isabel Carlin: **[0:00]** So, I'm now recording. Can you just tell me, do you consent to being recorded and to doing this interview with me?

Christie Bernados: Yes.

IC: And can you just state your name?

CB: Christie Bernados.

IC: Perfect! Thanks—

CB: And I consent.

IC: Yay! Thank you, Christie. Thank you so much for doing this with me. I'm really excited. I guess I'll just start with the first big question, which is: What brought you to activism?

CB: Yeah. I'm just going to try to absorb it right now and reflect.

I guess it started last year in 2020, and I know in one of my sociology classes there was an aspect of the class that was bonus marks, I guess, called "civic engagement," and anything that could be with a community or furthering engagement in community work. I was also at that time, I remember, wanting to know more about Philippine history. I wasn't really aware of any Filipino organizations at that time.

I remember knowing a person in the community and looking through his Instagram, actually. I do that often with people that I'm interested in their work, and just see who they're connected to or what they're following. **[02:03]** And I came across, I forget whose account it was, if it was Anakbayan Canada. So Anakbayan Canada, overseas international organization of youth and students—just youth organizing for national democracy in the Philippines. And I saw that they were having an event, [Philippine Society and Revolution] [an educational discussion based on the text *Philippine Society and Revolution* (1971) by Amado Guerrero].

To be honest when I took that event, that was my first understanding [of] history. Especially the part about resistance, I thought was really intriguing and inspiring to me. In attending that event, too, I had in mind that I had a bonus assignment for this class and I'm like, "This would be a great opportunity." I'm wanting to understand my history more and if it's for a class, too, then I think that would be really—it's like two in one. Through that session I remember learning a lot of new things that I never really thought of, and hearing—seeing names that were kind of familiar to me but I didn't know. For example, I remember in the

presentation they mentioned Andres Bonifacio [Leader of the Filipino revolutionary organization Katipunan (1863-1897)] and I remembered that, hey, my dad is named after this person, I don't know who this is! A lot of it has been—I feel like I'm almost going into a rabbit hole, but yeah. All of this process of finding, discovering new things. **[04:00]** It all coming together is how I was able to make sense of how I'm in the world, and with everything going on, too, especially with COVID. That was the beginning. This was in March, 2020, as well. I guess I'll stop it there. I could go on and ramble, but I'm not sure where that will go.

IC: I mean, you're always welcome to ramble on, for sure. Can I ask more about what you felt was coming together as you were learning more? What kinds of things were not together that were then coming together?

CB: Mm hmm. For my class, I remember in that class I had to do a paper on capitalism and how it impacts a lot of different people in Canada, and we read different articles. And I remember when I did that paper, I didn't have the same ideas as I would have now. I always think back about it. Me writing, researching, "Oh, this thing happened," and, "Capitalism is really bad because of this," blah blah blah. I remember how I wrote a whole essay on it and I didn't really understand and felt together with that idea.

What kind of came together happened a few months later, around the environment of that time. **[06:01]** This was in the summer now, in July. I also took a class, a Gender, Race, Social Justice class, and we talked a lot about different themes of social justice and putting into the context of COVID-19. Also was brought up during that time was the killing of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement. That was discussed in the class and also, obviously, online a lot, which everyone saw as well.

In the background, too, me understanding histories of resistance in my—in the Philippines. I guess that was how everything came together, of me understanding what capitalism really does, and how it is very systemic and so embedded in the different fabrics of society. I didn't realize. I think that was part of that coming together part, that I didn't see before when I had to write an essay about it in that class. I just realize, I just looked onto that article that I had to read and I didn't make those connections that I do now.

IC: Can I ask, when was that class?

CB: I know it was the second term of last year. So, when COVID happened, it switched online. First it was all in person and then it became online so we had to finish that class up online. **[08:06]** So that was like February, March.

IC: Gotcha. Yeah. If I'm hearing correctly, the timeline was—I'm just picking on this paper because you mentioned it—it's this February, March time. When was that event with Anakbayan Canada that you mentioned, was that the Philippine Society and Revolution one?

CB: I believe it was later March.

IC: Cool.

CB: That course was just ending that I had. And then I attended the Anakbayan event, and then I had the Gender, Race, Social Justice class the next month. And so that also brought it together.

IC: Nice. Yeah. Continuing into the summer, what—maybe this is a big question—what happened next in your political journey? If we're at this event with AB [Anakbayan] Canada, and then the Gender, Race, and Social Justice class—which was in Summer Term 1 of 2020?

CB: Yeah.

IC: So then, what happened between then and now, if you remember?

CB: Yeah. So, what happened then. I know after attending that event and the Anakbayan Canada event, just doing more— **[10:02]** I know—am I allowed to mention people's names too?

IC: Yeah, you can mention whoever you want. If later you want to take names out of the transcript, that's totally fine. Feel free to mention literally anything.

CB: So, in that event, it was—you introduce yourself in the chat. And then me saying that I'm from UBC and seeing this group, too, because there was this group, Sulong UBC, an affiliate of Anakbayan Canada. That was my first time hearing about this group. And I do remember Lara—she's part of that group—messed me, like, "Oh, you're from UBC, it's great to see you here," and let me know about the next upcoming event that happened.

I was really interested when I got that message, as well as just wanting to know more about what was happening, because I didn't feel super informed or I didn't have a space to talk about these ideas. I didn't know of any organizations and once I started to interact with Sulong UBC and finding out the connections, I was very surprised at how many different groups there were. Filipino groups in Vancouver. Because I thought there was nothing. I don't know why it was so hard for me to find out about these organizations.

Also, with the class in Summer Term 1, GRSJ [Gender, Race, Social Justice], **[12:01]** it was for a literature requirement. A lot of it was talking about really important issues happening around the world and ecofeminism, environmental justice, and I remember the prof being really passionate about these topics and issues, and talking about different places in the world. I feel like, before this time I was so in a bubble of the environment I'm in, and the people I talk to not really trying to understand the situations in different parts of the world. So, I think that was an avenue for me to really understand and become more aware of what's happening.

I think that social media played a big part of it, too, because I always find connections from social media, of different groups and continuing the ideas about anti-capitalism and revolution and stuff. So I think that really added on to layers and layers of what my political journey was.

[14:00] If you want to say the question again, I'm kind of forgetting where it can go now.

IC: Yeah. No, that's great. Maybe, then—so, did you attend the event that Lara sent to you?

CB: Yeah, I attended it. It was a screening of a movie called *Nightcrawlers*. I was surprised in that movie because it was really emotional and heavy to watch, it was very graphic of stuff that was happening. It was about the extrajudicial killings and the shoot and order kill [correction: shoot to kill order] towards—it's the War on Drugs [an anti-illegal drug policy implemented by Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte], so if you were suspected of drug dealing or possession of drugs, there's people who would find the person and then shoot them. There's a kind of gang that was targeting these individuals, and most of them were in the more poor parts of the—I think it was held in Manila. I was really surprised. I think in the back of my mind I did hear something about it, but I was very passive about seeing the information and thinking that there's nothing I can do about it.

IC: **[16:01]** Did that feeling of being passive change as you learned more, or maybe continued learning?

CB: Mm hmm. Yeah, really broadening and expanding my knowledge on different topics. I think it really helped as well, joining Sulong. So I joined Sulong, part of Anakbayan Canada. I remember my first meeting was just Lara and I. I was so confused, (laughs) I was like, "Oh, where's everyone else?"

I remember the—It was still nice to be able to talk about it with a group and at least understand these ideas, not just me looking at news. Yeah, I think it really helped, just talking about it. I forget what happened in the very first meeting but I just knew that I was happy to be in an organization and to know that there was an outside Filipino organization. Learning about even Tulayan [a Filipino community organization in Vancouver], how that existed.

IC: Cool. Can you remind me when you joined Sulong? It's okay if you don't have an exact date.

CB: **[17:58]** Yeah, I think it was end of March to early July, could be?

IC: Cool, yeah. Awesome, thanks. Can I ask, what were—because you mentioned a lot of learning new things or putting things together. Maybe this is a really big question but that's okay, just try. What are some of the things that you feel like you've learned?

CB: Yeah, that kind of is a big question (laughs). Maybe I'll also talk about learning about myself, too. It was really helpful in that journey. I think during the lockdown, too, like March and July, it was also a really introspective time. Just being by myself. The Term 2, Winter Term 2 [January-April], I also took a class. It's called Nurse 180, about stress, how to manage stress. That was actually a really beneficial class. It was really helpful. In that class we meditated every class (laughs) and it was so wholesome. I remember during that time I was

meditating more and trying to do some reflection work. It wasn't writing stuff down, more like thinking more deeply—**[20:04]** (laughs) I feel like I'm becoming deep.

What else have I learned? When I look back before, the time where I wasn't really—I didn't know a lot about different situations in the world. I reflect on my past conversations before and I find that it was more surface-level. That time, when I was by myself and just engaging myself in these topics, I feel like there's not—those surface level things were stuff that's like, you don't really need to talk about this, there's no substance to it. I feel that it has been helpful, learning—

So, what else. So, question, what I've learned. Yeah, it's kind of big. I'm not sure how to go step by step into it. But I think a big thing was just learning myself more. I talked about this to my friend, "What was I talking about before?" I don't even remember what I talked about before, how my conversations were like.

IC: That's really interesting. Thinking about conversations with substance. **[21:59]** If you're able to think about—just because you've mentioned having conversations, and earlier you mentioned that Sulong is a space where you can talk in a group—can you think of one of those times? If you remember a conversation or a group discussion or anything like that, and just tell me about it.

CB: I can't think of a group discussion right now. But I'm just thinking about when I talked to one of my close friends about a lot of the things that I've learned. I remember going on about my class, the Gender, Race, Social Justice class, and things that I've learned about in Sulong. I'm trying to think about the details that I was expressing. I can only think about the broad view of how capitalism—I don't know, it's so big.

I feel like I'm struggling to find my thoughts. It's coming and I can't really catch my thoughts right now.

IC: That's totally okay. I'll ask you a more concrete question, and hopefully that is not so everywhere. Can you just tell me a bit about what work you do at Sulong, what your position is and what tasks you do?

CB: **[24:03]** So, right now I'm the chairperson of Sulong UBC. Chairperson is the kind of spokesperson and if there's any calls to be in solidarity, make a statement to other groups, and also facilitating meetings and having a general overview of what the different events and activities that are happening within the organization. I know in the beginning when I joined, ideas that were brought up were—in terms of the things that we do, at that time we were part of the planning team of Kapit-Bisig, which was a mutual aid network. We had an Internet hub, a temporary Internet hub at Bahay Migrante ["Migrant House," a grassroots residence and community centre for migrant organizers] and it was to fill in the gap when libraries were closed, so people could access computers and printing services if they wished to do so.

Other things. I think at this time, too, **[26:00]** I wasn't exactly sure, but—or, I can talk about what have we been doing now. Sulong has been doing a lot of educational discussions. That's

how I found out about Sulong, so I always really enjoy those educational discussions, because I feel like it's very helpful to become more informed. Even someone choosing to register, that shows how they're already making that step to become more informed or wanting to know more.

I forget what I was going to say, sorry. I keep forgetting—my thoughts keep leaving (laughs).

IC: You don't need to apologize. It's already 5:40 p.m. so don't—it's late, the energy's low. Can you tell me what an educational discussion is? Can you define that?

CB: So, educational discussion. Sulong has a curriculum, PADEPA [Pambansang Demokratikong Paaralan ("National Democratic School")], I'm sorry, I feel like I can't really describe it too much. But currently we have PSR, which is [Philippine Society and Revolution], and we have split it up into four parts, going over what's happening. It's a timeline of, first, context on the Philippines, **[28:00]** and then next is what's happening, or the history and what's happening now, and then the solutions. I really like that outline of it.

I think about it as my journey, I guess, having the context first and then figuring out what's happening and the solutions. With preparing educational discussions or after, if I'm the one running it I feel a responsibility to find as much context as possible. So, a lot of that is doing research on—if we're talking about Philippine history—doing even more research on things that I'm not too confident on, like Spanish colonization, like US colonization. I think a lot of it has been me doing research on my own and finding sources. That's been really adding to my activism and political tendencies more. That question was educational discussion, but it's just a way of raising the consciousness of people. That's what I'll say right now.

IC: Amazing, thank you. Do you think you could walk me through, start to finish, what an educational discussion actually is like when you do one? **[30:05]** Sort of like, minute one when people come in, to the end?

CB: Yeah, so. People join in the beginning and we usually do an introduction and also do a land acknowledgment, and in this case we do one within the analysis of our organization as a way to make material change. Our analysis relates to how our migration is rooted in colonization and so, with that, it's really important to understand our positions and how we can contribute to ending displacement and disposition [sic] here on Coast Salish territories. That's why I think it's really important to make that connection, too.

After that land acknowledgment it depends on the topic that we're doing. For example, Philippine history, we start at pre-colonial and then Spanish colonization, US colonization, and then—yeah, I think history's a pretty dense one to start with and to give an example.

But yeah, a lot of learning, and we've had some guest speakers who have—who we see as our elders, who have experience doing the activist work **[32:02]** and have a lot of knowledge with them. I remember one session we had someone—Chandu, as well as Perry, Chandu from Damayan BC [a non-profit which serves migrant workers in British Columbia] and Perry from, he's the spokesperson for BAYAN [Bagong Alyansang Makabayan ("New Patriotic

Alliance”), an umbrella alliance of sector-specific Filipino organizations including Anakbayan]. I found that hearing from them was very helpful in understanding the context, because I feel that lived experiences are even more moving than just someone doing research on a group and just talking about it to a crowd. You feel more if you’re hearing from someone who experienced, for example, martial law or went to protests or a rally.

So we try to really incorporate that in our educational discussions and by the end have places for more interaction by sending our information. Trying to follow up with them after the event, even, for more avenues and spaces to engage more in these topics. And I think—educational discussions are—and education itself is a really good avenue to arouse people. **[34:01]** And it can’t stop there, you need that action, and I think that’s very important in activist work.

IC: Can you tell me what you mean by the word *arouse*, in terms of arousing people?

CB: Yeah. I associate that with an energy that’s there. For example, hearing about a story that’s very unjust, that should arouse people automatically. Once you have that, trying to gather that energy and put it into something that’s productive. That could be sending an email. For example, we did a workshop on the Junk Terror Law. We talked a lot about what it was and gave people a chance to—or sent them avenues and resources if they want to do more and take action to speak out against the injustice. So I think arousing is very—so education and arousing go hand in hand. Yeah, and having people create more questions in their head about, what my role is and how can I help? **[36:07]** I think that’s something to really get people.

IC: I guess, quickly, you mentioned Junk Terror Law. Can you tell me what that is? Not to make you rehash the whole workshop we just did.

(laughter)

CB: So, the Terror Law [Anti-Terrorism Act, 2020] in the Philippines came into effect in July, 2020. It broadens the—it’s a counterinsurgency measure that replaces the Human Security Act of 2007. And one criticism about it is that it broadens the term of what counts as a terrorist attack, and it’s very broad. And it also increases more power to the state and the forces, so there’s a council of cabinet officials [Anti-Terrorism Council] to choose who gets to be a terrorist.

A lot of it is subjective, so sometimes I get confused and wrapped up in what the act entails. But if you look at it in a broad, holistic approach— **[38:00]** and they put it into effect during the COVID pandemic, too, so you really question why they’re spending more time into this act instead of providing for people during the pandemic. I think a lot of it is really trying to stifle the dissent and put fear into people so they’re not able to speak up about the injustices that are happening. I think that’s really harmful.

IC: And so, I guess that’s the Terror Law. What was the “Junk” part of Junk Terror Law?

CB: Yeah. So, in our workshop we showed a “Junk Terror Law” carrd [a website: junkterrorlaw-ca.carrd.co] that consisted of ways to call your MP [Minister of Parliament] or send an email to them, to let them know about this law and for them to be aware. And I think it’s important that the MPs where we are in Canada can speak about it, because we know that foreign trade and relations are very important. We see that when the US stopped—I remember during the Marcos era [Ferdinand Marcos, Philippine President from 1969-1986, declared martial law from 1972 to his ouster in 1986] the [US] president at that time, Reagan, was— [39:59] I forget what that name is, when he stopped supporting—was it trade, or, something, I forget—

IC: I think it was military backing.

CB: Okay. Yeah. And so in the carrd, it’s a chance to be able to write to your MP saying, “This is unjust,” or, “I’m concerned about people in the Philippines,” and how that affects you. I think that action really helps to know that your voices matter. Even though if it’s something small, I think that was really helpful. And I don’t know, maybe, hopefully someone after this workshop went on to do more research on the Terror Law, or sent it to an MP, and maybe they did read it, and maybe the MP talked to their family about it. I don’t know, I just like to hear about or imagine the different connections and awareness that will spread and how we can unite more. It’s easier when there’s a united front and not—you can have more action with that.

IC: Awesome. You mentioned emailing and taking action in that way. What are some other types of action that you’ve taken as part of Sulong?

CB: [42:04] Some actions would be to—I know I mentioned becoming united, and one of them can be building coalitions or building relationships with different groups and organizations. For example, we’ve—Sulong spoke at the Day of Rage rally to free Palestine in July. That was actually my first protest that I attended. It was really nice to learn that there is solidarity with the struggle in Palestine as well as in the Philippines.

We also gave a statement at the EndSARS [movement to end police brutality committed by SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad)] rally for police brutality in Nigeria. I think that was also very important to really connect all the struggles and to really see who the enemy is.

I had a thought, I was going to say something but it left.

[43:56] I know—oh yeah, I was just thinking about how, it was recently the 35th anniversary of EDSA I [popular uprising in 1986 to oust Ferdinand Marcos, named after EDSA Boulevard], like People Power Revolution, and it was really nice to hear about how people from different walks of life got together. But it didn’t happen just in that moment, because leading up to that was a lot of talking with different people and more struggling to get people organized. I think that kind of energy is really great to hear about, and I know that Sulong is really helpful—or, it’s really great to know that we’re connected to a lot of different organizations that also are fighting back different causes and enemies of capitalism, as well as imperialism and any injustice.

When people put profit over people that's so—now I'm feeling a little agitated. I don't understand how the world sometimes—but I have a lot of hope and it's nice to express that hope and optimism with people as well. We're collectively thinking about ways that we can create a better world [46:01] that people won't—people have the potential to thrive and they're not just worried about surviving. They can find different avenues in life such as painting or reading. Just having to think about survival all the time is just very—yeah.

IC: Can you tell me about your first protest? That's so exciting! What was the vibe, what did you feel?

CB: Yeah, so, during—I wasn't too familiar at first about what was happening and the situation in Palestine. So that I could provide more context I remember I was listening to a podcast on my way to downtown art gallery [Vancouver Art Gallery]. I was listening to Revolutionary Left Radio, and that podcast has been helpful in understanding my thoughts and reflecting. Because I know that the host is also into meditation and I thought that was really nice to see. Like, oh, that's really—I'm into that, too.

But yeah, when I was there, I met with—there was around three members from Sulong there at first. So we met at a cafe first and then we just walked there together which was nice. During that time there were people speaking as well. [48:00] The first part of it was people also had signs and were chanting. I remember it was, "Free Free Palestine!" And it was—hearing that anger also, the compassionate anger in their voices. I wasn't saying anything at first, I remember, but then I started chanting with them and I felt more, like, oh, wow.

It was a very interesting experience and I'm glad that I was able to be in that presence of energy and after the chanting there was a presentation—or it wasn't really a presentation, there were speakers at the event, whether they're from different organizations, solidarity statements. For example, Sulong gave a statement, and I remember Independent Jewish Voices and also an organization to free political prisoners in Palestine [Samidoun].

And there's also cultural performances as well. Someone gave a poem, I remember. I thought that was really moving, talking about how their home is not—poems about your home and being removed from it and not being connected to it, I thought was very moving. And so there's a collection of really arousing speeches and poetry, music. [50:05] I thought I learned a lot about the issue. Being in that experience, in that space, is very different from if you're just watching a video or learning about it in class. So I thought that was really great.

IC: Awesome. It's just nice to hear about the arousing things that we do as part of organizing and taking action. That actually brings me to another question which I've been thinking about since you mentioned thinking about activism and your political tendencies. I was wondering if you could define what *activism* means to you.

CB: For me, I feel that it can really—I guess maybe I can try to take apart the word, like *active*. Active is part of—I don't know if that's where they're coming from. Activism is taking action on an issue that is very, that is not right. [52:00] Not right in the sense that it's hurting, it's

very harmful to someone. I'm trying to think about how to define it where, if someone's like, "Oh, it's harmful to me, I'm going to do something about it"—it can't be in that place of selfishness, it has to be in that place of being compassionate to an individual or a group.

I think that's very important thing to note is the compassionate—I see activism as sharing, or contributing to speak out against any injustice that has been enacted. I know it doesn't have to be the physical, going to protests and stuff, it's whatever is in your capacity. It could be the consciousness raising and it's to move—it can be step by step. I know you can make awareness from an Instagram or social media, but I know it can't be limited to that.

But also, what I was mentioning earlier about educating and knowing the context, because I feel like once you know more context about the issue and become more informed you feel more confident about talking about it, **[54:00]** as well as knowing how to—what the solutions are. I guess I was just saying, if you're thinking that what you're not doing is enough, it will add up. It's kind of hard to feel—you feel like you're not doing enough, but I think it's important to know that it's a collective effort. I don't know if that was a succinct definition of activism. It's so hard to put it in one phrase, because there's a lot of different parts to it.

IC: I think that was a great definition. Would you consider yourself to be an activist?

CB: Mm. Yeah. I don't say, "I'm an activist." Sometimes it's weird putting labels, but just a general wanting to help and care and doing so in the ways that are most beneficial to the group. Not just thinking, "if I do this it'll"—The example that I'm thinking about is, say, thinking to yourself, "this would help if I"—I'm just thinking about volunteerism [sic] in different places. I don't want to pretend that that's—but yeah, I guess. I forget, what was the question again?

IC: **[55:58]** It was really just whether you consider yourself to be an activist.

CB: Okay, yeah. I guess so. Just a person who wants—who sees an injustice and wants to do something about it, I guess.

IC: Gotcha. Yeah, that's a great answer, you did great. I have another question for you, and then we can hop around and think about other things we want to talk about. You mentioned a while back feeling hope and optimism, which I really liked. I was wondering if you could tell me about times when you really felt that, or things that are part of your activism work that give you that feeling of hope and optimism.

CB: Yeah, it was hard—it's sometimes on and off, that hopelessness and there's hope and then—will I get to see this happen? I remember in my GRSJ course that I took, in the last class the prof was like, "You can't just hope. There needs to be action in this." So I thought that was very—that really stuck to me. I can't just hope this will go away. I need to take action. What I do to feel more hopeful and optimistic is just understanding that this is not for me, I don't want to— **[58:01]** it's for the people who come next, their generation.

I know—I feel like, I’m going to quote that quote about, “You’re planting a tree that you’re not going to sit under, that you’re not going to see.” I really enjoy that quote and I think about it a lot. I think that hope and having that support from people, if you are feeling hopeless about the situation of what’s happening, at least having some people that you can fall back on and talk about these things with. I think that’s very important, and why I really want to see that—hope is wanting to have people, always have those connections with people and not—because if you don’t have, I think what I mentioned, too, if you’re just thinking about surviving, it’s so—It makes me mad, or really upset, but also I understand—I know that I have to try to contribute and do what I can.

IC: Yeah. I really like that. Can I ask who are some of the people you feel like you can fall back on or have that connection with?

CB: I have—my friend Bryce. **[1:00:00]** I think he’s just the one person that I can talk more about these injustices and situations. And also, when we have our meetings, like our Sulong meetings, it feels like there’s a sense of community and knowing that we’re here for the same reasons and we’re—it’s a very collective effort. Shout out to my friend Bryce, he’s really close. I always like—I’m never doubting whether or not to say something, I can always let my words flow and just do that.

IC: That’s awesome. Shout out to Bryce.

(laughter)

IC: I’m just going to ask—I know we’re getting on an hour now, so let me know if you want to stop at any time, or we can always pick it back up later, or just end whenever. But, I wanted to ask about that feeling of being in a collective, and how you experience or feel being in a collective. What does a collective mean to you, and what does it feel like to be in a collective?

CB: I feel that it’s a space that’s consistent. **[1:02:06]** I like how we do have meetings, and I see a lot of Sulong members always and I never get tired of that. And to understand that we have the same task, to envision and to bring awareness of what a better world, a liberated world—what a liberated Philippines would look like and what a liberated world in general. Being in a collective, I think it’s not just doing the work of education and actions, it’s having that community that you care for and that cares for you as well. Because someone’s life, it’s not just Sulong member, like athlete, or like to meditate, we’re all very dynamic people. It’s important to have a space where we can try to express all those parts of us and not feel that—because in a liberated world it’s where we can all fully express ourselves. **[1:04:00]** And really care for each other.

Being in a collective, I think it’s very nurturing to know that there’s a community that you’re part of, and I think it’s also great, (background conversation) being able to connect to different—For example, Anakbayan Canada’s national and I was able to connect with people from across Canada, like Toronto, and I thought that was really—it was a nice feeling to understand that they’re in this work too. And even, there’s a lot of different events and educational discussions all around the world. So, I think that was very—(laughs) so loud

[referring to background conversation]. Yeah, I don't feel alone in this work, so I think that's very helpful, and helps me keep going in furthering what I can do. Just seeing the different energies in the room is really great.

IC: Awesome. Yeah. I'm wondering, can you tell me a bit about the work you did with Anakbayan Canada? Just what that was like, or what you did?

CB: So, with Anakbayan Canada, too, I was part of the propaganda committee and we—**[1:06:02]** and in creating that committee, was also joining—we had a meeting, and—

For Sulong, being part of Anakbayan Canada, having even the coordinating meetings with everyone from different chapters is just always a great sense of community and support. Like we hear about what they're doing in their different chapters and we can kind of feed off each other and seek out help and resources if we need. So, I think that was really great to know that there's that community as well to fall back on and to ask for support and who have experience.

I also remember attending an event from a different chapter in Canada, it was Anakbayan Toronto, and they had a migration stories workshop. I kept thinking, because—that time it was also an art workshop, and we did a share back and talking about different experiences, and I thought it was really great to have that intimate conversation about your own personal identity. I was attending a Zoom call across Canada, and I thought that was really special, too.

IC: Awesome. Yeah. What's Zoom like? What is organizing online like?

CB: I always think about what it would be like, if it wasn't online. **[1:08:03]** But, I am grateful that I was able to connect with a lot of people through this online environment and it did really help me during the pandemic because a lot of—because we're just really—or I'm mostly alone in my bedroom and I think this is the most that I've talked to different people (laughs). It's the most social I've been. Which is funny, but also it is hard in that, wanting to be more connected to different members, because you just leave the meeting, instead of after the meeting maybe going out for coffee or just catching up on things.

So, yeah, the dynamic has changed. I see that online, too, it's a chance to connect with people who are looking for that connection, I believe. Maybe. I think that's a nice way to think about organizing and maybe being exposed to different avenues. I know that my social media is—I don't really see people that I know on social media anymore. A lot of it is just different pages, different organizations or memes (laughs)—memes that I see. **[1:09:59]** How I've interacted with social media has changed during 2020, with activism, too, so I think that's interesting to think about.

IC: How does that change feel? Is it interesting, is it maybe good or bad or somewhere in the middle? How would you describe it?

CB: I think it's good in the consciousness raising, and also when people need the material support, there's an avenue for that. But that should only be temporary and it's not—I don't

know if you saw the tweet by GoFundMe saying, “We’ve had a lot of GoFundMe pages but that’s not how it’s supposed to be.” I do think for that reason social media has been really helpful to get that across to people who are needing that support. And there’s been a lot of infographics that you see a lot of the times, and I think it is helpful, but it does have a limit if you’re only doing it passively. It’s interesting just thinking about social media and [if] it’s good or bad. I think it can be both, to a certain extent. It has really great tools for connection and I like seeing the positive about it, but also being aware of how it’s limited.

IC: **[1:12:05]** You said you noticed a shift from seeing people you know, and your friends maybe, on social media to mostly organizations and pages. How do you feel about that transition?

CB: I feel like I hear about a different grassroots organization all the time. It’s nice seeing all these different communities and wanting to try to participate. For example, I found a book club. I don’t know, their follower [count] is kind of low but the books they’re discussing are really interesting. I haven’t messaged them, but just looking through what other organizations are doing. I think it’s very—and also not even just organizations, community members. It is a way, I feel, of trying to stay more connected, in that sense. Yeah, learning from different people.

IC: Cool. I have a question and then—this is kind of my last prepared question. So you mentioned thinking about your work as planting a seed **[1:14:01]** for a tree that you might not see, or might not sit under. And doing the work for the people who come next. So I was wondering if you had a message, or something you would say to someone who gets to sit under that tree that you’ve helped to plant.

CB: I feel like I need to say the most perfect sentence but everything is messy. It won’t—nothing is very linear. I don’t know, things are messy and it’s nice to understand that what you’re feeling now is temporary, so change is always possible. I like to think that nothing is permanent, the only permanent thing about life is change. Yes. I always try to remember that. It’s not “it is what it is,” it is what it can be. It’s nice to have that imagination and really cultivate that.

IC: Yeah. I think that’s a perfect message for the future. I thought that was great. Is there stuff that I missed? Is there anything you want to talk about that I totally just blew by, that I haven’t asked a question about?

CB: I’m not exactly sure. **[1:16:01]** I don’t know, I feel like this is a big topic, you can talk about different things. I think trying to make it a personal thing, too, can really further—or make me understand things more and relate to it. Like talking about migration, the forces that have me and my family to settle here. Understanding that has pushed me more into why I want to do this, and I want to see not that family separation.

IC: Is family separation something that you’ve experienced, or your family has experienced?

CB: Well, I—I just kind of see it in the eyes of my parents, or, I guess, me as well. Because I was born in Vancouver, and I was raised here, and I have only one aunt, or one *aunt* I say [pronounces "aunt" differently second time]—it's weird that I grew up saying *aunt* and not *tita*. Yeah, and so it felt kind of like a small family. But when I remember going to the Philippines, seeing, woah, like I have so many cousins, and how they're all together, it was just really—I feel like I'm going to cry. **[1:17:58]** (cries)

IC: Yeah. I feel that, too. It's hard to be away from, you know. Because they call each other and treat each other like siblings, and then yeah, we're just here. In a way. Oh, you're going to make me cry.

(laughter)

IC: Is it an interview if no one cries at the end, good lord.

CB: Yeah. Like whenever I think about it I get really sad. Because then, (cries) my mom's family, they're all there, and she gets so happy on the phone with them. So it's like, I wish that could be all the time.

IC: Yeah. Yeah. It is hard to think about the—the conditions that are, I guess, at the root of that migration.

CB: Mm hmm. [Christie makes a peace sign]

IC: (laughs) The peace sign was really good.

CB: Mm hmm.

IC: Does your family know about or participate in the work that you do, about the Philippines?

CB: Um, not really. I feel like there's tension between my parents, but I feel like I've been talking a lot to them about different things, stuff happening in Canada and also in the world, I always mention. **[1:19:55]** But whenever I mention politics in the Philippines it doesn't go to them. They say things like, "Yeah, that's so unfair," about other issues. When my mom said, "Capitalism makes rich people richer and poor people poorer," I was like, "She was getting something," but then. I feel like it's a lot of probing and having these conversations with them.

I feel like I have been talking a lot about those issues with my dad, specifically, because I think he enjoys talking about it as well. It's nice to hear their ideas and their understanding. It's sometimes hard to come at one conclusion and I don't know. It's a little project of mine, to become more open and talk about these things with them.

IC: Yeah. And it's a long project, too, it often is. So, don't feel discouraged.

CB: Mm hmm.

IC: Do you feel like there's a—because I'm thinking about your work with Sulong as being one of the things that led you to develop that consciousness. I don't really know where that question was going. I guess I wanted to ask more about how those conversations with your parents went, or if there are things that you've learned at Sulong. If there's a link between specifically the work you do as chairperson at Sulong and more general conversations about politics.

CB: **[1:22:02]** It has really helped actually, even in school, just thinking about these topics. And conversations, too.

[pause]

I'm just thinking of the most recent—I think yesterday, there's the news that the labour minister in the Philippines is like, "Oh, if you give us"—to Germany—"if you give us vaccines we'll give you nurses and health professionals." I remember mentioning to my dad, "Do you hear about this? What do you think?"

Talking about those ideas, how the government in the Philippines is treating their citizens as commodities and something to be traded. Seeing those headlines and connecting to the ideas even in personal life. Like the nurses and how are nurses and healthcare professionals affected by the pandemic, and even the larger topic about people working in the front lines. **[1:24:01]** How there's an idea of, "Oh, they're—" That they're heroes. They are heroes and we should be able to provide them with that material support. I always wonder, what specific supports are they getting.

For example, in long term care homes, it really shows the way that we treat the seniors in society is also reflective of the way we treat workers who work with the seniors. They're not paid enough, so maybe they have to work at different care facilities. Understanding those links and putting into some personal context, you know, "Why the government doesn't pay them more." When I hear about the government or states, how they're putting those big companies in priority than [sic] the majority of people. It's always that sentiment that I'm trying to talk about with parents.

It gets them mad too. It's also good to understand that we can strike **[1:26:02]** and take action against this. I also feel like wanting to be more involved in labour in Canada. I know that we've recently discussed about hotel workers in Vancouver, so I feel that I want to do what I can to help out. These instances have helped me understand more about, hearing about how the hotel industries are planning to fire workers who have been working there for 20, 30 years and replace them with new workers because they would be offered a cheaper salary. So it's just very—continuing to see the pattern of how it's never really truly beneficial to the majority of people. Kind of forgot what the original question was.

IC: No, I think that was great. I also had to take a second to remember it. I remember I'd asked about the specific connection between your work at Sulong and some of those conversations with your parents.

CB: Oh, yeah. I try to see, when I talk about these things with my parents, ways that can empower them. Because they do work with seniors and they notice in the work how it's isolated, too. **[1:28:01]** When they say that, "Oh, I'm talking to—I have to see this client," but then they have to go to the next client. It's so fast, they can't have a conversation in that amount of time. And when they tell me things like, "Oh, my client invited me to talk more but I have to go," it's so—and it's also hard that it's still not a collective community in their work. They don't know the other coworkers and things like that.

So I'm very interested in having those conversations with them and seeing if they are able to see a better way to do this. Because they say, "Oh yeah, it's so bad, it's sad that they do this," or, "Some of these schedulers don't care about us sometimes." And it's really nice to hear when my mom does talk about how she calls back to the supervisor saying that, "This is not right," blah blah blah. And yeah, furthering and seeing different ways that they can change their situation in just a small way. I've tried, "What if you made a group chat with your work?" I don't know, it's different for—that would maybe be helpful if they're younger, I feel. I don't know, I don't know if they are in contact a lot. It's just, ways that they can build community and talk to their other coworkers and talk about their situation. **[1:30:03]** I think it's important.

IC: Are the workers at your parents' workplaces unionized? Is there an organization?

CB: Yeah, I think they are unionized. It's a really big union. There's not a lot of action with it, I think. My dad's like, "Oh I just pay them the union fees and I don't go to any meetings," so I'm not sure. But it's good that both my parents are in the same job, so at least they can interact with each other. But when my dad was saying he doesn't know who works with the same client, it's interesting how there's no sense of community in that way.

IC: I'm just curious, is that isolation a consequence of the COVID pandemic, or was that also the case before COVID?

CB: I think before COVID, too. Or I've just been trying to understand it more. I feel like before, I didn't really ask them, "How's your work? What do you do? Give me steps on what you do from the time you walk into the house." I've been more interested in that. I'm kind of blocking that, "I can't talk with them about personal life." **[1:32:01]** Now it's more connected and I feel like I can have a conversation, a friendly conversation with them, which is nice. But I think it still has been isolation before COVID, just going house to house. Even during COVID there's times. In the afternoon this person sees this client and then that evening this person goes to check on the client. I think it's also harmful to the client because there's no consistent person that they can maintain a relationship with or build a connection to. I think that's what I'll say for now.

IC: **[1:32:56]** Yeah. It's really amazing that you've learned all of this and had those conversations with your parents about what their work conditions are like. You mentioned that now you feel more connected, almost in a holistic way, with your parents, being able to

talk about your social life or your personal life and ask them about what their work is like. Can I ask when or even why that change might've happened?

CB: Yeah, um. Not too sure. I think with the pandemic and the lockdown I've been talking to them more. **[1:33:58]** Maybe it's wanting to see their opinions on these ideas and what I mentioned earlier, the project of mine for them to be open to talking about alternatives to capitalism and socialism and revolutionary communism. I remember my dad's like, "You sound like a communist," and it was a very weird statement (laughs). Even hearing their initial thoughts and ideas and questioning, "But what about this?"

It's nice to see the process of how our conversations go. Sometimes it's very open and other times it's going a direction where I'm mentioning the economy—my dad—I remember, it's so weird, him just like, "You sound like an environmentalist," and I'm like, he's saying that like it's a bad thing, and I was just like, "Yeah." And then, it's nice to see how their views or what topics are more open to change. I guess that's a big thing. **[1:36:01]** I always like having these conversations, too. Right now it's been more my dad, just because I feel like he has a lot of different knowledge and he does have a lot of thoughts about these things, and I still haven't broken [sic] that wall with my sister, for example. I feel like a lot of it is more surface level. That's also another project. I've been trying to invite my sister to different events and discussions but I don't know. It's a process.

IC: How old is your sister?

CB: She's only one year older than me, so I don't know how we're not super super close. I've shared a room with her most of my life, but these conversations are still more superficial. I think it also helps changing—trying to change the dynamic of our relationship. I don't know, I thought it would be easier but it's not.

IC: Yeah. And it's interesting, too, because we're organizing in our houses where we live with people. So that definitely—I don't know, I feel like it makes a difference. First—do you still share a room with your sister? **[1:38:03]** That's my first question because I'm curious.

CB: No (laughs). I actually started at the pandemic, in April—no, I think it was earlier, but last year. So I probably wouldn't be doing this if we still shared a room because there's no desk, and just a bunk bed. I'm glad to have this space where I can have these discussions and lock the door. I always, I don't know, I like having my privacy.

IC: Yeah. That totally makes sense. And even, just not bothering someone else when you're talking is good. Cool. Can I ask, how are you feeling? One, just broadly about—we're talking about activism, so—your work at Sulong, where you're at now in February, 2021, what's the feeling? What's your sense of your work?

CB: I'm enjoying this conversation and being able to reflect on it. It's nice to always reflect on why you're doing this and your intentions. I think I'm feeling really good. I always feel that there's so much to learn and sometimes I struggle with thinking I have to know everything about this. **[1:40:03]** But it's always a process. I have to remind myself, we always start

somewhere and even though there's—there's always going to be so many books and things to read, but it's also nice to have those interactions with people. And I hope, I'm just really—it's nice thinking about the year and all the knowledge that I've intaked [sic] and absorbed and all the conversations I had.

IC: Yeah. And that is—I feel very encouraged by that. I often get stressed out about having so many books on my reading list, so many podcasts and videos to watch, so yeah, it is really nice to reflect and be like, "I've already learned a lot and it's always going to be a process."

CB: Mm hmm.

IC: Is there anything else you want to share with me about your work or maybe even—actually, I have an actual question. What's your perspective on being a youth activist, specifically? Being a young person in activism?

CB: I think that it's very moving. I think a lot of it, too, is unlearning that you're just obeying the government or obeying these powers, but also being confident in your voice **[1:42:03]** and just confident in how you move through the world. It's also inspiring, in that we can think about the next generations and how we want—how they can—

Finding words.

How the next generations can live and see the world as more open and liberating for all, all people. I think that youth, because of the tools that we have, with education, the educational institution, and the enthusiasm and newness that we see in the world, it's not—

I know we talk about this in Sulong and the role of the youth, and how it's different if, for example, you're at a job and you're just becoming desensitized to think that this is normal and it's just the way it is. But with youth there's a lot of energy and imagining something that can change. Therefore, I think that it's so, so crucial **[1:44:00]** that we are able to talk about these ideas and to hold them and believe that they can carry out. Trying to not really go with what other authorities say is correct, or the right way to do something.

IC: Thanks. That was really interesting. Is there anything else that you want to touch on today? Any other topics or just thoughts that you have in general?

CB: I'm good. (laughs) I'm chill. But it was nice, yeah, it was nice talking about, and going through these ideas.

IC: Yeah. It was also really nice for me. Thank you so much for sharing all those thoughts.

CB: Mm hmm.

IC: I feel like I really learned a lot, just from hearing you talk about joining Sulong and all that.

CB: I'm glad. I'm excited for this oral history project.

IC: Me, too. I'm going to stop the recording now, if that's okay with you.

CB: All right.