

MANILA —

windowless

night

a small,

philippine prisons & policing

a mini-zine

Nobody is helping me

to survive,

BULOSAN CENTER
FOR FILIPINO STUDIES
UC Davis, Asian American Studies



"Prisons do not disappear social problems,
they disappear human beings."

Angela Y. Davis

"I feel like a criminal running away from a
crime I did not commit. And this crime is that I
am a Filipino in America."

Carlos Bulosan

"Son, we will get justice someday.
Remember that."

Lorenza Delos Santos

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about this zine

This mini-zine was created by members of the Transnational Research and Activism Team at the Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies during the Summer 2020 term.

This year saw a surge in mass outrage surrounding state-sanctioned violence, both in the United States and the Philippines. At first glance, these two issues appear completely unrelated — quite literally an ocean away. But “Philippine Prisons & Policing: A Mini-Zine” (briefly) attempts to uncover and explore the linkages between American and Philippine systems of policing, prisons, surveillance, and state violence.



about the bulosan center

The Bulosan Center for Filipino Studies is hosted by the UC Davis Asian American Studies Department under the directorship of Dr. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez.

The Bulosan Center's mission draws from the life's work of Carlos Bulosan, worker, writer and activist. We produce, preserve, and disseminate knowledge about the Filipinx experience in the United States and the broader diaspora. Our research and education programs are driven by our close partnerships with community-based organizations. We focus particularly on the most marginalized, underserved, and vulnerable populations in the Filipino community.

Contact us at bulosancenter@ucdavis.edu if you would like to know more!

how did we get here?

prisons & policing as colonial constructions

— UNDER SPANISH RULE

The Spanish colonial government introduced a formal prison and policing system to the Philippines in the 19th century. Prior to Spanish arrival, communities established their own laws, and local chieftains resolved disputes and set penalties for violators.

But why prisons, and why in the 19th century — and not earlier? Historian Greg Bankoff writes that the Spanish colonial government turned to imprisonment as a final effort to remain in control. Earlier defeats to the British had weakened the Spanish military, while secularization movements in the Philippines had diminished the Church's influence.

With that in mind, Bilibid Prison was built in Manila in 1865. At the time, it was believed to be one of the largest prisons in the entire world, with over 1,000 beds. The Spanish built several other penal institutions throughout the islands, but Bilibid served as the lifeblood of the new colonial prison system. Many of these institutions were filled with political prisoners opposed to Spanish rule.

In 1868, the Spanish established the Philippine Guardia Civil, the first police force to cover the entire archipelago. In the 1890s, as Spain was losing control of its colony to the revolutionary Katipuneros, it began employing undercover agents to surveil civilians and suspected insurgents.

— UNDER AMERICAN RULE

When American imperialists took over the islands, they, too, sought to control the Filipino revolutionaries. Having inherited the prison infrastructure from the Spanish, the American colonial administration established the Bureau of Prisons in 1901.

These prisons, especially the Bilibid, sought to rehabilitate prisoners — ultimately aiding the cause of benevolent assimilation by portraying imprisoned Filipinos as the grateful beneficiaries of American kindness. Bilibid even became a popular tourist spot during the colonial era, furthering the image of Americans as generous colonizers. (It's worth noting that nearly a century later, viral videos of imprisoned men at a Cebu prison dancing to Michael Jackson's "Thriller" served a similar function.)

Meanwhile, the American colonial government was devising new tactics to contain Filipino revolutionaries. Building off Spain's Guardia Civil, they established the Philippine Constabulary — the direct precursor to modern-day's Philippine National Police — in 1901. The Americans also expanded Spain's nascent surveillance infrastructure, planting informants throughout the archipelago to alert the colonial administration of any rebellious activities. Suspected revolutionaries were transported to and incarcerated in faraway prisons — or simply assassinated.

— "INDEPENDENCE" TO TODAY

Even after the Philippines was officially granted independence in 1946, the policing tactics initiated by the Spanish and fine-tuned during the American regime continued and intensified. The prime example: U.S.-backed dictator Ferdinand E. Marcos, who declared and presided over nearly a decade of nationwide martial law that resulted in 70,000 political detainees, 34,000 people tortured, and over 3,200 deaths.

Political leaders following Marcos' 1986 ouster continued to use the colonial template of control: political arrests, forced disappearances, extrajudicial executions, massacre, misinformation and surveillance.

Since 2016, when Rodrigo Duterte began his term as president, over 134 human rights

defenders have been killed, the majority of them farmers. Duterte's War on Drugs has claimed nearly 30,000 lives, some of them political dissenters framed as drug users. Today, as COVID-19 ravages prisons, over 200,000 people — including over 600 political detainees — remain captive. And Duterte's signing of the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2020 has heightened fears of repression amongst activists, journalists, and lawyers.

The Philippine government has also shown itself to outlaw not only dissent, but poverty. Squatting and sidewalk vending — two vital acts of survival for the urban poor — are heavily criminalized. Residents in poor neighborhoods, especially the shantytowns of Metro Manila, are subject to police violence, surveillance, demolitions, and forced relocations. And the vast majority of War on Drugs casualties come from poor communities, prompting critics to call Duterte's policy a war on the poor.

The United States, not merely the architect of the Philippine police state, continues to play an active role in repression and policing. U.S. military bases remain in Philippine cities via the Visiting Forces Agreement. The Philippine National Police (PNP) has conducted joint programs with police departments in San Francisco and New York City; in 2018, the PNP posted police attaches in San Francisco and Los Angeles. Meanwhile, Duterte has accepted over \$550 million in military aid from the U.S. since 2016, and, this year, secured a \$2 billion arms sale with the U.S. government.

What, then, is a pro-Filipino prison, or a pro-Filipino police force, or a pro-Filipino intelligence agency, if all of these were created under colonial regimes to pacify Filipino revolutionaries? Are such things possible? Or must freedom in the archipelago also mean freedom from prisons and policing?

how did we get here? pt. 2

how policing tactics travel thru "capillaries of empire"

Mainstream discussions about police rarely mention the linkages between police violence in the United States and the Philippines — what historian Alfred McCoy calls the “capillaries of empire.”

In the early 1900s, Filipino resistance to American colonization was so powerful that the United States was forced to develop brand new counter-revolutionary tactics: namely, an extensive state surveillance and policing apparatus.

To do so, the U.S. combined new technology — such as phone lines, fingerprinting, and photo identification — with cadres of detectives, spies, patrolmen, and secret servicemen. The U.S. also employed heavy censorship and misinformation campaigns, passing sedition and libel laws to stop the flow of radical thought. And although Filipino nationalists and separatists continued to resist colonization, American counterinsurgency tactics were quickly proving successful.

So successful, in fact, that these strategies made their way back to American soil. In early twentieth-century Pennsylvania, miners and factory workers had formed some of the strongest labor unions in the country. Looking to break strikes, local leaders established the Pennsylvania State Police in 1905 — the country’s first-ever state police force — modeled

after the Philippine Constabulary.

August Vollmer — remembered in his *New York Times* obituary as the “father of modern police science” — drew extensively from his service during the Philippine-American War. After becoming Berkeley’s first police chief in 1909, Vollmer introduced now-standard policing tactics such as fingerprinting, crime-mapping, and radio patrol cars.

During World War I, U.S. Congress passed the Espionage Act of 1917 and the Sedition Act of 1918, which bore resemblance to colonial censorship on the islands. Col. Ralph H. Van Denman — former chief of army intelligence in the Philippines — brought colonial surveillance tactics to the United States to spy on German Americans. After the war, as militant workers’ movements spread throughout the world and the U.S., these same intelligence tactics were used to spy on and infiltrate radical groups and labor unions.

Van Denman is often remembered as the “father of U.S. military intelligence.” And so we have Vollmer and Van Denman: both ‘fathers’ of the modern American military and police state, both with roots in pacifying the ‘little brown brothers’ across the Pacific.

Throughout the 20th century, the Philippine islands continued to serve as a sandbox for American policing and counterinsurgency techniques. Even the Patriot Act of 2001, one of the most massive expansions in U.S. government surveillance on its own citizens, could not have been possible without the military intelligence infrastructure first developed a century ago in colonial-era Philippines.

As state violence and surveillance return to the forefront of U.S. national discussion, it is worthwhile — perhaps necessary — to follow these “capillaries of empire” as they travel between American cities, the Philippine neo-colony, and all other nations subjected to U.S. imperialism.

now what?

— PHILIPPINE HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Organizations across the U.S. are calling for the introduction and passage of a Philippine Human Rights Act (PHRA) through U.S. Congress. The PHRA would cease all military aid to the Philippines until human rights violations by Philippine security forces cease and the responsible parties are held accountable. (Since 2016, the U.S. has sent \$550 million in aid to the Philippine military and police.)

Learn more about the PHRA and action items at humanrightsp.org.

— ORGANIZATIONS TO FOLLOW (NON-EXHAUSTIVE)

- *BAYAN* (*Bagong Alyansang Makabayan*), an alliance of progressive Filipino organizations founded during Martial Law.
- *KARAPATAN*, an alliance of human rights defenders in the Philippines.
- *KAPATID*, a support organization for the families and friends of political prisoners in the Philippines that works for the prisoners' release and protection of rights.
- *KADAMAY* (*Kalipunan ng Damayang Mahihirap*), an alliance of organizations supporting and mobilizing the urban poor of the Philippines.
- *ICHRP* (*International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines*), a coalition of organizations and individuals allied with the Filipino people in defending human rights.
- *MALAYA MOVEMENT*, an organization seeking to broaden U.S.-based support for the cause of freedom and democracy in the Philippines.

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