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“ANTI-MARCOS FILIPINOS,” OTHER ANTI-IMPERIALIST DIASPORAS, AND THE PRAXIS OF COLLECTIVE JUSTICE: THE SOLIDARITY POLITICS OF THE COMMITTEE FOR JUSTICE FOR DOMINIGO AND VIERNES’S (CJDV)

Michael Schulze-Oechtering

ABSTRACT. This article examines the solidarity politics of the Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes (CJDV), a defense committee organized in the wake of the June 1, 1981 political assassinations of two Filipinx American trade unionists and solidarity activists, Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes. Specifically, the article examines the ways CJDV activists consistently linked the political assassinations of Domingo and Viernes to a pattern of political repression faced by not only “anti-Marcos Filipinos,” but also Latin American, Haitian, and Palestinian solidarity activists in the U.S. In order to theorize this broader community of struggle, I develop two concepts in this article: “anti-imperialist diasporas” and the “praxis of collective justice.”

On June 1, 1981, Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes, both 29-year-old Filipinx American labor organizers and officers in the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union (ILWU) Local 37, were gunned down in their Seattle-based union hall. While the double murder was initially framed by local media outlets as a “typical gang slaying,” court testimony pointed towards a politically motivated assassination that implicated Philippine Dictator Ferdinand Marcos. Even prior to court proceeding related to the murders, a 1979 investigation in the *Washington Post* documented the existence of the “Philippine Infiltration Program,” a bilateral agreement between the United States and the Philippine governments that allowed Marcos’s intelligence agents to travel freely into the U.S.¹ When taken together, these two developments only

1. Elaine Ko, “Committee Launches Civil Suit: New Challenges for the Justice Struggle” *Call for Justice*, n.d., Seattle, Washington.

affirmed what the close friends, family, and comrades of Domingo and Viernes believed all along: Marcos, his intelligence agents, and even U.S. officials were implicated in the murders of the two union leaders.

When the Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes (CJDV) devised their civil suit, *The Estate of Silme Domingo, et. al. v. The Republic of the Philippines* (hereafter cited as *Domingo v. The Philippines*), they framed their legal case as an act of self-defense for “anti-Marcos Filipinos.”² *Domingo v. The Philippines* sought injunctive relief for a “very identifiable class of people: opponents of the Marcos dictatorship who are of Filipino ancestry.” For the next seven years, CJDV activists labored tirelessly to build a movement around their lawsuit. As a legal challenge, *Domingo v. The Philippines* pursued two goals: (1) The “prosecution of all conspirators in the assassination,” which CJDV members believed would lead them directly to Philippine and U.S. intelligence agents; and (2) an end to “the harassment of anti-Marcos activists via ‘terminating the PIP.’”³ However, to confine the significance of *Domingo v. The Philippines* to the courtroom would do a disservice to the organization’s capacious vision of justice.

Not only were Domingo and Viernes anti-Marcos activists within the *Katipunan ng mga Demokratikong Pilipinas* (KDP), a radical, anti-Marcos organization based in Filipino American communities across the U.S., they were also members of a “communist party building” formation that emerged a year prior to their deaths, the *Line of March* (LOM). As an organization, the LOM viewed “militarism/imperialism and racism” as “the distinctive pillars of U.S. capitalism.” Given that these processes converged in the murders of Domingo and Viernes, the CJDV played a critical role in the LOM’s broader goal of building a broad-based Left movement in the U.S. around the strategy of a “United Front Against War and Racism.”⁴ Specifically, CJDV activists connected the political assassination of Domingo and Viernes to a “growing trend of political repression” in the U.S., which was most dramatically illustrated in political attacks against U.S.-based solidarity activists: The assassination of Orlando Letelier, a Chilean political exile; “anti-Duvalier Haitians” who were accused of violating the U.S. Neutrality act; and Palestinian immigrants who endured indefinite detention and potential deportation” through the McCarran-Walter Act. The CJDV maintained, when taken together, these acts of state violence revealed the “link between imperialism and fascism.” As Rene Cruz, one of the plaintiffs in the CJDV’s case, put it, “The [imperialist] policy that the U.S. government wants to conduct with impunity not only means authoritarianism

2. Rene Cruz, “State Visit Bares Dangers for Anti-Marcos Movement,” *Call for Justice*, Sept.-Oct. 1982, 6.

3. David Della, “Press Statement of the National Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes,” September 14, 1982, in the author’s possession.

4. Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (London: Verso Books, 2002), 273.

abroad. It also means an impulse towards authoritarianism at home” (own emphasis).⁵

While the deaths of Domingo and Viernes occupy a prominent position with Filipinx American Studies, there are few scholarly treatments of the dynamic multiracial organizing that followed their assassinations.⁶ This article both fills this historical gap within the growing field of Filipinx American anti-martial law activism and responds to historian Robin Kelley’s broader call to “rethink the 1980s.”⁷ As Kelley has argued elsewhere, the 1980s was not only defined by “[conservative and racist] backlash, neoliberalism, or precarity,” but also by militant opposition. This included “an intense period of protests for jobs, peace, and nuclear disarmament” and “domestically... a push and a belief in the possibility of an authentic, multiracial rainbow [coalition] politics.”⁸ In the pages that follow, this article pays much needed theoretical attention to the multiracial organizing strategies and political analyses that informed the CJDV throughout its eight-year history (1981–1989).

I contend that CJDV’s legal advocacy and coalition building were guided by a *relational understanding of state repression*. By this, I mean activists within the organization understood that an attack on one segment of the U.S. Left, such as the murders of Domingo and Viernes, only strengthened the U.S. state’s capacity to surveil, arrest, detain, and kill other *communities of struggle* who shared similar anti-imperialist analyses and political commitments. This analysis is not unique to the CJDV or the 1980s. This line of thought was most clearly articulated by movements to defend Black political prisoners a decade earlier. James Baldwin powerfully captured this political sentiment in his 1971 letter to Angela Davis as she awaited trial for allegedly supplying weapons to Jonathan Jackson, the younger brother of incarcerated Black Panther, George Jackson. Baldwin ended his letter with the statement, “if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.”⁹ While CJDV activists did not have direct political links to defense committees for Black political prisoners, they approached the murders of Domingo and Viernes with a similar political urgency.

5. Rene Cruz, “Why the Immunity Plea: U.S. Foreign Policy is Criminal,” Call for Justice: National Newsletter of Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes, March 1983, 5.

6 One example of the CJDV’s prominent position within Filipinx American Studies is the recent edited volume of KDP memoirs, *A Time to Rise*, where an entire third section of the book is dedicated to the CJDV. *A Time to Rise: Collective Memoirs of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP)*, eds. Rene Cruz, et. al. (Seattle: University of Washington, 2017).

7 For examples of the “growing field of Filipinx American anti-martial law activism,” see Mark Sanchez, Joy Sales, Karen Hanna, and Michael Schulze-Oechtering and Wayne Jopanda’s contributions to *Filipino American Transnational Activism: Diasporic Politics Among the Second Generation*, ed. Robyn Rodriguez (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

8 Robin Kelley, “Over the Rainbow: Second Wave Ethnic Studies Against the Neoliberal Turn” (lecture, University of California San Diego’s Department of Ethnic Studies, San Diego, CA, May 18, 2016).

9 James Baldwin, “An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis,” *The New York Review*, January 7, 1971, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1971/01/07/an-open-letter-to-my-sister-miss-angela-davis/>.

According to CJDV activists, the 1980s were a dangerous time to be an anti-imperialist in the U.S. The decade saw the Reagan administration intensify its strategic relationship with repressive regimes abroad, such as Marcos's dictatorship. This not only involved an increase in U.S. military aid to right-wing regimes, but also the passage of repressive legislation that targeted solidarity activists in the U.S., who Reagan accused of colluding with "soviet-inspired international terrorists." In this light, CJDV activists maintained, dictators around the world closely followed the Reagan administration's unwavering support of Marcos. According to CJDV activists and their supporters, if transnational systems of repression, such as the PIP, were not immediately challenged, and more importantly defeated, other authoritarian regimes would not hesitate to follow Marcos's lead and violently target their U.S.-based opposition. In this context, the CJDV viewed defending the democratic rights of anti-Marcos Filipinos, namely their right to political dissent, as part of a larger political strategy of curbing domestic repression in the U.S. One important dimension of the CJDV's political work involved highlighting the precarious position of anti-Marcos Filipinos, as the nature of repression they faced served as a possible fate for other segments of the U.S. anti-racist and anti-interventionist Left.

CJDV activists also understood that the development of a "united front" of progressive forces in the U.S. was needed to curb the escalating nature of repression under the Reagan administration. Throughout the 1980s, CJDV activists and supporters drew links across movements that confronted the larger structure of U.S. Empire during the 1980s, but often operated, to use the words of CJDV supporter, "in their own silhouettes."¹⁰ In this article, I develop a term that I use to refer to the broader community of consciousness that the CJDV's organizing called into being: anti-imperialist diasporas. To borrow from Moon-Ho Jung, anti-imperialist diasporas were "seditious subjects" who were both "radicalized and racialized subjects of the U.S. Empire."¹¹ First, anti-imperialist diasporas refer to migrant, refugee, and American-born communities whose physical presence in the U.S. were directly related to U.S. imperialist policies in their "homelands." A second, and arguably more important dimension of this group was their anti-imperialist politics. Given that repressive regimes funded by the U.S. consistently appealed for popular support of U.S. citizens, anti-imperialist diasporas increasingly found themselves to be targets of state surveillance and repression. In response, CJDV activists and their allies stressed the point, as political exiles, migrants, refugees, and in the case of Domingo and Viernes, the American born children of immigrants, that their racial identity, immigration status, and most importantly, their anti-imperialist politics made them subject to various forms of state violence. As the pursuit of justice for Domingo and Viernes brought these different communities of struggle together, CJDV activists increasingly framed

10. Max Elbaum, Interview by Author, July 14, 2020.

11. Moon-Ho Jung, "Seditious Subjects: Race, State Violence, and the U.S. Empire," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 14.2 (June 2011): 224.

political assassinations, extradition, deportation, and indefinite detention, as distinct, but interconnected methods of “legal terror” faced by anti-imperialist diasporas. In turn, their relational understanding of state repression gave way to a praxis of collective justice. Namely, the CJDV built a united front that not only protected anti-Marcos Filipinos and their “right to dissent,” but also challenged a broader political logic of “national security” that threatened the livelihood of all anti-imperialist diasporas in the U.S.

Who Had the Most to Gain?

Who had the most to gain from the assassinations of Domingo and Viernes? Within forty-eight hours, CJDV activists devised a “political assassination theory” that linked the deaths of Domingo and Viernes directly to their political work within the[ir] union [Local 37] and within the Filipino community.” This drew them first to Domingo and Viernes’s prominent roles as reform movement activists within the Local 37. For much of the 1960s and 1970s, a conservative brand of labor leaders ran the Local 37. Not only were they unaggressive when it came to improving workers’ wages and labor conditions, they developed a predatory relationship with their members. Local 37 officials of this period instituted corrupt practices that gauged the wages of rank-and-file cannery workers, such as, demanding bribes in exchange for being included in the season’s canning crew, or establishing an illegal gambling ring, which Local 37 officials significantly benefited from. From Domingo and Viernes’s perspective as reform movement activists, “the capacity to mobilize and educate the members [of the Local 37] to fight the industry was completely dependent on the struggle to clean up the union.”¹² By the time of Domingo and Viernes’s death, the reform movement had quickly transformed from a rank-and-file caucus to a critical mass within the Local 37 executive board, where they held eleven of the seventeen elected positions within the union.¹³ This shift in the union’s balance of power alone was enough to prove motive in the murders. However, conservative union leaders were not the only “powerful force” that Domingo and Viernes’s labor activism threatened.

In a 1989 speech, Cindy Domingo, the chairperson of the CJDV and the younger sister to Silme, explained that Domingo and Viernes operated from an expansive vision of “workers’ rights.” As she put it, “Workers’ rights for them was a broad political struggle that included the struggle for working people to work at their maximum potential without the fear of repression or oppression, whether those workers be

12. Bruce Occena, “Working Papers on the Lessons Drawn from Our Response to Fascist Attack in Seattle—The Murders of Comrades Gene and Silme,” *Frontline* (Oakland: Line of March Publications, 1982), 21.

13. Glenn Suson, “The 70s in Review,” *Alaskero News*, February 1980, 2.

in Alaska, Seattle, the Caribbean, the Philippines, or Southern Africa.”¹⁴ Their internationalism, Domingo explained, was cultivated and nurtured within the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP), a radical organization based in Filipinx American communities during the 1970s and 1980s. According to KDP activist Rene Cruz, when the organization formed in 1973, sev-eral of the group’s founding members had already been in consultation with “key leaders of the Philippine left underground” about “lay[ing] the groundwork for a revolutionary organization [in the U.S.] that would bring together, train, and guide the most progressive and militant elements of the Filipino community.”¹⁵ From the KDP’s inception, its members adopted a “dual program” that addressed itself to the “transnational character” of Filipinx communities in the U.S.¹⁶ First, they mobilized Filipinx Americans in the U.S. for socialist revolution, mainly through immersing them-selves in community-based struggles for civil rights, ethnic studies, and economic justice. Second, they labored to build a strong base of support in the U.S. for the left-wing of the anti-martial law movement in the Philippines, the National Democratic Movement, which was led by the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). As Bruce Occena, a former member of the KDP’s executive board, noted, the Seattle chapter’s work within the Local 37 quickly became one of the most “mature expressions of the KDP’s political program.”¹⁷

By the Local 37’s 1980 election, the KDP had taken hold of a majority of the union’s leadership position. This firm base of support among the union’s rank-and-file compelled KDP members to translate their anti-imperialist labor politics into a concrete program of international solidarity with workers in the Philippines. In March of 1981, the national office of the KDP organized a trip to the Philippines, which allowed Viernes to meet the leadership of the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU), a progressive labor federation in the Philippines. The KMU was not simply “militant in its economic demands,” but also “explicitly anti-Marcos in its political demands—calling for the overthrow of the dictatorship.”¹⁸ Moreover, the KMU’s leadership had a fierce critique of U.S. imperialism in the Philippines. As KDP member Theresa Rodriguez wrote shortly after Domingo and Viernes’s murders, KMU activists often asserted, “Filipino labor will not be free until the whole nation is liberated from U.S. domination.”¹⁹ At the time of Viernes’s visit, the

14. Cindy Domingo, Untitled Speech, n.d., The Cindy Domingo Papers, University of Washington Special Collections (Hereafter cited, CDP, UWSC), Box 2, Folder 25.

15. Rene Cruz, “Introduction: A Snapshot—The Life and Times of the KDP,” A Time to Rise.

16. KDP activist and scholar Geline Avila emphasizes that the KDP has developed an understanding of the transnational character of the Filipinx American community well before scholars within academia had popularized it as a theoretical lens. Geline Avila, Interview by Author, November 15, 2020.

17. Occena, “Working Papers.”

18. “A Commentary by the Committee for Justice: What Frames the Murders of Viernes and Domingo?” CJDV Update, 4.

19. Teresa Rodriguez, “Foreign Intelligence Operation in the U.S.?: The Assassination of Two Seattle Unionists,” CounterSpy, March-May 1983, 12.

KMU amassed a collective membership of 250,000 workers, an impressive number given the severity of repression faced by the trade union movement under the Marcos regime. One of Marcos's first presidential decrees under martial law, General Order No. 5, was a government ban on strike activity and union participation. By 1980, these adverse conditions for labor organizers paved the way for a "39% drop in real wages under seven years of martial law."²⁰ Under these circumstances, both KMU and KDP understood that international solidarity was an urgent need for the Philippine working-class and the prime political task of Filipinx American radicals who lived in the "belly of the beast" of the U.S. Empire.

During Viernes's stay in the Philippines, he and KMU leaders, President Felixbero Olalia and Vice-President Crispin Beltran, "devised a plan for the KMU to host a delegation from the ILWU to investigate the conditions of Filipino workers."²¹ Prior to Viernes's visit, the only U.S. labor union to take a political stand on Marcos's regime was the United Farm Workers (UFW) when UFW leader Cesar Chavez traveled to Philippines in 1977. As Philip Vera Cruz, the highest ranking Filipinx officer in the union, recalled,

"It was tremendously good publicity for Marcos and pro-Marcos people...Cesar had his picture taken with Marcos, and Marcos gave him a special Presidential Appreciation Award! Cesar was even quoted as saying that from what he had seen it looked like Martial Law was really helping the people...It was just a disgrace. Cesar was toasting with Marcos and all those phony farm and labor leaders appointed by Marcos at the presidential palace, and at the same time, on the other side of Manila, the real union leaders and farm workers were in jail."²²

KDP activists understood the importance of this kind of public spectacle. As anti-Marcos groups in the U.S. made every effort to publicize the Philippine dictator's egregious human rights violation, Marcos's interest in cultivating ties with the UFW extended beyond the union's position as a nationally recognized movement for racial and economic justice. It was certainly not lost on Marcos that the UFW had a significant Filipinx membership. By claiming the UFW as a U.S.-based ally, Marcos was attempting produce the illusion that he held popular support among Filipinx Americans. As KDP activist Geline Avila remembered, Marcos liked to claim what he termed, the "silent majority" within Filipinx American communities. This referred to individuals

20. "Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes: History and Goals," n.d., CDP, UWSC, Box 3 Folder 5.

21. "Anti-Marcos Labor Activists Murdered: Marcos Linked to Seattle Slayings," Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes, n.d., 4.

22. Craig Scharlin and Lilia Villanueva, Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement (Seattle: University of Washington, 2000), 134-135.

who did not openly express their opposition to his regime. In turn, he suggested that their silence was a sign of his overwhelming approval rate. In instances where Marcos attempted to produce public displays of his alleged popular support, Avila explained, KDP activists engaged in a “shadow dance” with the Marcos regime, where KDP activists organized counter-protests that demonstrated the fierce opposition that Marcos faced in the U.S.²³ In turn, Viernes’s trip to the Philippines escalated this counter-offense against the Philippine dictator. However, rather than challenge the optic of public support for Marcos, Viernes traveled to the Philippines in the interests of genuine dialogue and solidarity with the Philippine working-class.

Upon Viernes’s return to the U.S. the following month, he flew directly to the ILWU’s national convention in Honolulu, Hawaii, where he read a letter from KMU activists that detailed the repression and exploitation that Filipinx workers endured under the Marcos regime. This resulted in the passage of a successful ILWU resolution, which both condemned labor conditions under the Marcos dictatorship and called for an investigative team to be sent to the Philippines. It would take several years for the CJDV’s team of lawyers to assemble the evidence that linked the ILWU resolution to Domingo and Viernes’s death. However, CJDV chairperson Cindy Domingo recalled the per-spectives of CJDV members at the time of the organization’s inception: “We were absolutely sure that the dictatorship had something to do with these murders.”²⁴ This political conviction raised a troubling line of questioning. If Marcos indeed had the ability to extend his repressive state apparatus into the U.S., what did this mean for anti-Marcos activists operating in the U.S., as well as groups who had critiques of U.S. imperialist policies more broadly? To respond to this urgent po-litical question, KDP leaned on a concept that informed their critique of the “special relationship” between U.S. and Philippine ruling elites during the Marcos era, the “U.S.-Marcos Dictatorship.”

The New Meaning of the U.S.-Marcos Dictatorship

In the KDP, the term “U.S.-Marcos Dictatorship,” served an important political purpose. The Marcos regime was marked by an erosion of civil liberties and labor policies that propelled the Philippine working-class into a deepening economic crisis. Under these conditions, Marcos’s primary method of managing political dissent was a “repressive state apparatus.” At its core, Marcos had at his disposal not only “a standing army of 250,000,” but also “an extensive integrated national police force” and “1.5 million military reservists.” By referring to this enormous capacity for state violence as the “U.S.-Marcos Dictatorship,” KDP activists highlighted the fact that the violent arm of the Philippine state

23. Avila, Interview with Author.

24. Cindy Domingo, Interview with Author, August 13, 2020.

was “built under the direct tutelage of the U.S. government,” and, more specifically, Marcos’s reign “would unravel without extensive U.S. support.” KDP activists meticulously tracked U.S. military aid to the Philippines, which steadily increased throughout the 1970s. At the outset of Marcos’s declaration of Martial Law, the U.S. provided the Philippine dictator \$40 million dollars in military aid. By the end of the decade, this allocation reached upwards of “\$100 million annually.” Reagan’s ascendancy to the U.S. presidency only further solidified the U.S. government’s financial backing of the Marcos regime. In 1982, U.S. military aid to the Philippines reached unprecedented heights: \$151 million.²⁵ With this in mind, a key dimension of the KDP’s political work, whether they held protests in front of local Philippine consulates, led political education workshops, or performed guerrilla theater, was to make visible the connections between U.S. military aid and the Philippine dictator’s repressive state actions. However, the murders of Domingo and Viernes, as well as the transpacific system of surveillance that facilitated it, the PIP, gave new meaning to the concept of the “U.S.-Marcos Dictatorship.”

In 1979, the PIP came to the attention of KDP activists through the investigative journalism of Jack Anderson. His findings revealed that the PIP, for one, was in existence since 1973, and two, not only promoted regular communication between U.S. and Philippine intelligence agencies, but also allowed for agents of Marcos’s “extensive intelligence apparatus” to travel freely to the U.S. in order to “monitor, surveil, harass, and silence the anti-Marcos opposition” in the United States. It is worth noting, the PIP was not an exceptional development in U.S.-Philippine relations. As Alfred McCoy has thoroughly analyzed in *Policing America’s Empire*, the sharing of information between U.S. and Philippine intelligence agents dates back to the Philippine-American War.²⁶ However, the Marcos regime’s decision to project its “long arm of repression” into the U.S. posed a new problem for those in the KDP.

To appreciate the new-found vulnerabilities that the PIP placed upon KDP activists, one has to understand the demographics of the organization. The KDP’s membership was comprised of equal parts Philippine nationals, many of whom migrated to the U.S. as political exiles of Marcos’s martial law regime, and Filipinx Americans who were politicized in the context of anti-racist and anti-war movements in the U.S. For both groups, the murders of Domingo and Viernes forced them to confront troubling realities. For those in exile, they now had to contend with Philippine intelligence agents who operated in the U.S. with increasing regularity. This had the potential to render life in exile moot. Similarly, the deaths of Domingo and Viernes sent a powerful message to Filipinx Americans in the KDP: U.S. citizenship did not shield them from Marcos’s remarkable capacity to exact violence on those who opposed his rule, even individuals on U.S. soil. It would not

25. Della, “Press Statement of the National Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes.”

26. Alfred McCoy, *Policing America’s Empire: The United States, The Philippines, and the Rise of the Surveillance State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2009).

take long for KDP activists to be reminded of Marcos's ability, and his willingness, to terrorize his U.S.-based opposition.

In September of 1982, Marcos was scheduled for a high-profile visit to Washington D.C., a deeply troubling development from the perspective of KDP activists. According to members of the KDP's Committee to Oppose the Marcos Visit, Reagan's warm welcome for the Philippine dictator marked "a significant change in U.S.-Philippine relations." While past administrations consistently provided military and economic support to Marcos, KDP activists acknowledged, previous presidents "at least had the saving grace of being embarrassed by Marcos' antics." Here, KDP activists were explicitly referencing Marcos's glaring human rights violations, which, by the time of his 1982 U.S. visit, not only included the wholesale suspension of civil liberties, but also the arbitrary detention of over 70,000 people and the "disappearances" of upwards of 230 prisoners.²⁷ KDP activist Odette Polintan was based in Washington D.C. during this period and recalled a "series of frightening, unexplained incidents" intended to intimidate anti-Marcos Filipinos.

[S]ome of us were 'visited' in our homes by these thugs; our CTF [Congress Task Force] office was broken into without anything valuable being lost or stolen; car windows were smashed; and one of our KDP activists in San Francisco was almost forced off the highway on her way home from work.²⁸

The following year, the intuitions of KDP activists were confirmed, as CJDV lawyers uncovered a U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) circular that stated, "five Philippine military attaches" were sent to the U.S. a couple months prior to Marcos's visit. One of the military officers was Lt. Col. Roman Maddela, an individual "listed by Amnesty International as a known torturer of Marcos opponents." By the DIA's estimation, "This new group of military representatives" was "the most impressive Manila has dispatched to the U.S. in years" and would "undoubtedly report on, and possibly[y] operate against anti-Marcos Philippine activists in the U.S."²⁹ In order to build a broad-based movement that could protect itself from this escalating context of surveillance, intimidation, and repression from Marcos agents, KDP activists had to develop a clear analysis of what politically unified Marcos and Reagan and how this was relevant to other solidarity movements. KDP activists referred to 1981, the year Marcos initially requested to come to the U.S., as the "Year of the Dictator." During that year, not only had Marcos requested a visit, but Chun Do Huan of South Korea, Roberto

27. Committee to Oppose the Marcos Visit, "STOP THE MARCOS VISIT," 1981, CDP, UWSC, Box 2, Folder 21.

28. Odette Polintan, "Working the Corridors of Power," *A Time to Rise*, 144.

29. "The Smoking Gun: Philippine Agents in U.S.: Defense Intelligence Document Points to Conspiracy," *Call for Justice: The National Newsletter of Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes*, October 1983, 1.

Viola of Argentina, and Napoleon Duarte, of El Salvador had all made visits to Washington D.C. These were powerful illustrations of the new U.S. administration's unconditional support of repressive regimes abroad. Reagan not only turned a blind eye to these dictators' gross human rights violations, but he also saw them as critical partners in a foreign policy agenda that unapologetically waged war against what he labeled "the forces of Soviet-inspired terrorism."³⁰ Accord to KDP activist Rene Cruz, Marcos demonstrated his commitment to Reagan's militarist Cold War agenda by "literally lock[ing] up before leaving home." According to KDP activist Rene Cruz, this included unleashing "1,000 plainclothes marshals who like the El Salvadorian regime's death squads, promptly shot on sight some 50 criminal suspects." Moreover, Marcos declared a state of emergency, where he "put a 250,000-man army on alert and order them to take over the public transportation system." In what could be read as a direct extension of Domingo and Viernes's murders, "KMU's top leaders, Felixberto Olalia and Crispin Beltran were jailed, along with scores of other labor activists."³¹ However, this was far from the extent of Reagan's political alliance with Marcos.

Even prior to declaring martial law, Marcos was unapologetic in his commitment to making the Philippines the long-term home to two of the largest U.S. military bases in the world, Clark Air Field and Subic Naval Base. As one KDP report noted,

In the Pentagon's view, Clark Air Force Base and Subic Naval Base are extremely strategic; they serve as the logistical hub of U.S. military deployment in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. In addition, the bases are key to U.S. intervention strategies in Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia, East Africa, and the Near East." As one military strategist put it, "losing the Philippines would be the equivalent of losing Iran."³²

This position revealed precisely why anti-Marcos struggles were on the front line of the Reagan administration's attack on solidarity activists. In a similar fashion to other strategic sites of U.S. empire in the Pacific, the Philippines, particularly under the Reagan administration, served as "the tip of the spear" of U.S. militarism.³³ Given this, it is no coincidence that the very same month that Domingo and Viernes were assassinated, then Secretary of State Alexander Haig publicly praised

30. Committee to Oppose the U.S.-R.P. Extradition Treaty, "Danger: Extradition," 1982, 2, CDP, UWSC.

31. Cruz, "State Visit Bares Dangers for Anti-Marcos Movement"

32. Emergency Committee on Political Extradition, Detention, and Deportation: Foreign Policy and the Threat to Civil Liberties, "Fact Sheet on the Philippines," n.d., CDP, UWSC, Box 4, Folder 29.

33. The term "tip of the spear" is typical a reference to Guam as a strategic site of U.S. military installations. However, in the case of the Philippines during the 1980s, the term is particularly fitting.

Marcos and reaffirmed U.S. support for his regime. “You [Marcos] can indeed be confident that there is a new America, an America that understands you and must bear the burden that history has placed on our shoulders, to lead and shore up when necessary those endangered on the front lines” (own emphasis).³⁴

When KDP activists read Haig’s declaration of support to Marcos alongside the political assassinations of Domingo and Viernes, it painted a dire picture of what the solidarity movement in the U.S. could expect to face from the Reagan administration. Rene Cruz could not help but interpret these events in relation to their broader implication for anti-imperialist and anti-interventionist movements in the U.S. In an article for the CJDV’s inaugural national newsletter, *Call for Justice*, he wrote, “As the U.S. ruling circle sinks deeper in a quagmire of political and economic problems, its impulse toward openly repressive rule abroad and at home quickens” (own emphasis). In this light, the CJDV became a crucial movement vehicle, not only for the defense of KDP members, but as a means of building “a united front among progressive groups of people who oppose any assault on democratic rights” within the U.S.³⁵ Key to this political strategy was the CJDV’s civil suit, *Domingo v. The Philippines*.

Filed on September 14, 1982, its plaintiffs not only sought monetary relief for the Domingo and Viernes family, but also insisted upon “a court order to stop the Philippine infiltration plan.” More-over, by calling for the “prosecution of all conspirators in the assassinations,” which included “Marcos and his wife, Imelda; [U.S.] Secretary of State Alexander Haig, U.S. Attorney General William Smith, and other [U.S.] government officials,” they highlighted the united front’s central position, “the assassinations of Gene Viernes and Silme Domingo were a product of [a] U.S. foreign policy.”³⁶ This policy, Cruz maintained, was based upon “military intervention, war provocation, and subversion of legitimate governments, and support of fascist dictatorships.”³⁷ From an organizing stand-point, the next crucial step was to build a movement that could transform the CJDV’s legal case into “an important vehicle for mass political education” for a diverse cross-section of left movements in the U.S.³⁸ For this, the CJDV would not only lean on a national network of KDP activists across the country, but their connections to a diverse array of anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and feminist organizations affiliated with a communist party formation that emerged in the early 1980s, the Line of March (LOM).

34. Committee to the Oppose the U.S.-R.P. Extradition Treaty, “Danger: Extradition,” 3.

35. Cruz, “State Visit Bares Dangers for Anti-Marcos Movement.”

36. “Civil Suit Filed: Marcos and U.S. named in the Murder of Seattle Activists,” *Call for Justice*, Sept.-Oct.1982, 1.

37. Rene Cruz, “Why the Immunity Plea: U.S. Foreign Policy is Criminal,” *Call for Justice*, March 1983, 4.

38. Cruz, “State Visit Bares Dangers for Anti-Marcos Movement.”

A United Front of Anti-Imperialist Diasporas and the Praxis of Collective Justice

In the inaugural edition of the CJDV's national newsletter, *Call for Justice*, Rene Cruz's contributing article, "Will Marcos's Repression Extend to the U.S.?" detailed the broader political context that informed the CJDV coalition politics. "What is now unfolding in real life," Cruz contended, "is the frightening but predictable reality that U.S. sponsorship of reaction and repression abroad breeds repression at home." The political assassinations of Domingo and Viernes were an extreme expression of the Reagan administration's broader assault on solidarity activists, but far from an isolated one. According to Cruz, this repressive turn included, "the deportation of Salvadorians to face imprisonment or death," the use of the U.S. Neutrality Act against "anti-Duvalier Haitians," and a new executive order from Reagan that allowed "the CIA to spy on domestic groups that have links with international movements." By Cruz's estimation, the later development represented the "virtual legalization of the COINTELPRO program of the Nixon years."³⁹ When taken together, the grounds for building a broad-based movement against state repression were apparent to KDP activists. Their connections to the Line of March (LOM) proved critical to this endeavor.

In *Revolution is in the Air*, historian and former LOM member Max Elbaum argues that few Left formations in the U.S. were "able to adjust effectively to the rightward turn in U.S. politics that gathered momentum through the mid and late '70s."⁴⁰ However, the LOM made a consistent effort throughout the 1980s to build a national communist party out of the rubble of repression and reaction and KDP activists occupied a prominent position within the leadership of the organization. This meant that when KDP activists formed the CJDV, they had at their disposal a wide array of committed revolutionaries, many of whom had years of experience in black liberation, feminist, and anti-imperialist movement organizations. For instance, the LOM's leadership board included the likes of Frances Beal and Linda Burnham, founding members of the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA), a former caucus within the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) that later evolved into a revolutionary feminist collective committed to eradication of capitalism, racism, imperialism and sexism.⁴¹ As a member of the LOM's executive committee in charge of overseeing the work of the organization's labor committee, Elbaum recalled how the multitude of experiences with state repression that LOM members brought to their political work lent critical insight into the development of the CJDV.

39. Cruz, "Will Marcos' Repression Extend to the U.S.?"

40. Elbaum, *Revolution is in the Air*, 270.

41. For a discussion of the TWWA, see Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* (Durham: Duke University, 2005).

We had experienced that period of the assassinations of the [Black] Panthers...red squads...and those of us who came out of that, mostly, learned that lesson that go-ing public, exposing who is doing this, building a mass movement is your best protection...we are not going to out gun the other team here. It is a mass perspective that is going to defeat repression.⁴²

KDP activists remained at the center of the leadership of the CJDV. It was widely understood within the organization that critical attention to political developments in the Philippines would be paramount if they were to connect the Marcos regime to the assassinations of Domingo and Viernes. However, as KDP activists increasingly found themselves subject to surveillance, harassment, and repression in the U.S., the LOM's broader membership possessed an analysis of how to protect each other from state violence as they operated in the "belly of the beast" of U.S. Empire. As Elbaum put it, "[W]e were going to publicize this [Domingo and Viernes's murders] ...demand that the killers were brought to justice...and turn public opinion against the use of the violence."⁴³

Under the guidance of prominent members of the KDP and LOM, the CJDV quickly developed an expansive movement infrastructure, which included local and nationally circulated newsletters and, at least in Seattle, up to eight different "outreach teams" that ranged in focus, from anti-racism, women's rights, labor, the Filipino and Asian American community, and peace and solidarity movements. Beyond formulation of the CJDV's initial analysis and strategy, the outreach teams provided another outlet for LOM activists to influence the development of the CJDV. Chairperson of the CJDV Cindy Domingo remembers, "There was a 'LOM center' that developed the political line in which you'd do outreach with" then "there was someone in that LOM center coordinating that CJDV work."⁴⁴ Gerald Lenoir was perfect example of this. As head of the "anti-racist outreach committee" he organized a forum only two months removed from the murders that framed the "execution-style slaying" of Domingo and Viernes "as an attack on all fighters for racial and social equality." The role of Lenoir and other LOM members heading CJDV committees was to identify members of their community, who "may never have known Silme and Gene personally," but who had the "objective basis to understand the importance of countering such fascist attacks" and were willing to "take up the campaign for justice as their own."⁴⁵

As the diversity of outreach teams suggests, the CJDV imagined and nurtured solidarity from a multitude of positions far too numerous to do justice within the pages below. Yet, a particular community of activists were positioned at the center of the CJDV's organizing efforts:

42. Elbaum, Interview with Author.

43. Ibid.

44. Domingo, Interview with Author.

45. Occena, "Working Papers," 9.

recent immigrants and political exiles who were especially vulnerable to state repression based upon their support for “countries struggling for national independence” and their strong condemnation of “U.S. foreign policy in those countries.”⁴⁶ Across the CJDV’s eight-year history, its members took it upon themselves draw out the connections between Filipinx, Central and South American, Haitian, and Palestinian solidarity activists and the broader current of political repression that these anti-imperialist diasporas faced. In doing so, they modeled a practice of solidarity that Barbara Ransby has described as “political quilting.” Writing in respect to the Movement for Black Lives, Ransby described the process of political quilting as a method of sustaining a “powerful mass movement” through forging “strong and reinforcing ties between our various communities, organizations, and movement sectors.” In a similar sense, the forums, conferences, and memorials organized by the CJDV did the much-needed political work of “weaving together” the anti-imperialist diasporas’ “disparate patches of struggle.”⁴⁷ In doing so, CJDV activists modeled a praxis of collective justice, which recognized that mutual liberation required seemingly different groups to learn from one another, fight for one another, and refuse a narrow vision of justice that does not include one another.

Those in the CJDV knew full well, the murders of Domingo and Viernes existed within a longer continuum of state violence enacted against U.S.-based solidarity moments. One of CJDV’s earliest public events provided a forum for its members to learn from Chilean solidarity activists living in exile. On August 6th and 7th of 1982, CJDV organized a two-day teach-in culminating in a conversation between KDP chairperson, Rene Cruz, and Isabel Letelier. Letelier’s deceased husband, Orlando, served in the administration of the democratically elected socialist president of Chile, Salvador Allende, where he held positions of U.S. Ambassador and Minister of Defense. After a 1973 military coup overthrew Allende and paved the way for dictator Augusto Pinochet’s rise to power, Letelier lived for a year in a concentration camp, only to be freed after “international public pressure.” Upon Letelier’s release, he lived in Washington D.C. for the following two years, where he worked for the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), a progressive foreign policy think tank, which provided him a platform to agitate for the ouster of Pinochet’s repressive regime. In 1976, in the context of growing international criticisms of the right-wing Chilean military dictatorship, Letelier and his co-worker at IPS, Ronni Moffitt, died as their car exploded in front of the Chilean embassy in Washington D.C.⁴⁸ As Isabel Letelier detailed her late husband’s political activism, as well as his tragic death, her insights offered important lessons to CJDV activists.

46. “Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes: History and Goals.”

47. Barbara Ransby, *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century* (Oakland: University of California, 2018), 148.

48. Letelier and Moffitt, “Domingo/Viernes Teach-In on Political Murders,” n.d., CDP, UWSC, Box 2, Folder 11.

As a means to prepare anti-Marcos Filipinos for what they could potentially encounter under the PIP, the first day of the teach-in was dedicated to the screening of the documentary, *The Dead Are Not Silent*, which provided a detailed account of the international operations of *Direccion de Informaciones Nacional (DINA)*, Pinchot's secret police force. Based upon the informational fact sheet circulated to teach-in attendees, a likely point of conversation was Michael Townley. The actions of Townley, one of the assailants involved in Letelier's killing, demonstrated that DINA's capacity for violent action in the U.S. was heightened through its close ties to the CIA. Prior to joining DINA, Townley worked for the CIA as part of a right-wing terrorist group, *Patria y Libertad*. Just days prior to Letelier's car bombing, Townley visited Audio Intelligence Labs in Florida, a CIA front, where teach-in organizers reasoned, "he probably purchased equipment for bombs." Moreover, he was aided by five Cubans with ties to "right-wing terrorist exile groups"—Guillermo Novo Sampos, Alvin Ross, Jose D. Suarez, Virgilio Paz, and Ignacio Novo Sampol.⁴⁹ The teach-in highlighted two important points: in order for a DINA agent to carry out assassination attempts on U.S. soil, both U.S. resources and access to a diasporic network of Cuban terrorists were necessary. These features of Letelier and Moffit's case would reinforce key aspects of the CJDV's political assassination theory, which stressed the role of U.S. intelligence agents and pro-Marcos factions in the Filipinx American community, particularly conservative union leaders in the Local 37, in the deaths Domingo and Viernes.

Immediately following the teach-in, CJDV activists confronted an alternative form of political repression: extradition. Marcos's September 1982 visit to Washington D.C. was motivated in part by an effort to push forward a new U.S.-Philippine extradition treaty. This was not an isolated incident. By the time of Marcos's state visit, two pieces of legislations were making their way through the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives. Senate Bill (SB) 1940, which was proposed by staunch segregationist Strom Thurmond, CJDV activists maintained, "would politicize the extradition process by stripping the courts of the power to rule on the 'political offense exception'—a clause which is found in most extradition treaties." Additionally, the law would legalize unconstitutional detention, where "at the request of a foreign government," someone could be "arrested and detained for up to 60 days without the requesting state providing the necessary documents to show 'probable cause' that the detainee is guilty." By the time of Marcos's state visit, SB 1940 was "approved unanimously" by the Senate Judiciary Committee and a concurrent House Resolution, HR 6046, was being pushed forward by Democratic representative William Hughes. HR 6046 maintained the court's jurisdiction over political offenses but recommended "very restrictive guidelines by which offenses can be

49. Ibid.

considered political.⁵⁰ In this context, the KDP activists recognized that extradition would be another critical arena of struggle to strengthen the united front that had initially converged around the deaths of Domingo and Viernes.

The mutual threat that Reagan's foreign policy posed to the civil liberties of political exiles, migrants and refugees compelled six organizations—the KDP, Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN), Haitian Refugee Project, American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC), and the National Immigrants' Rights Center—to form the Emergency Committee on Political Extradition, Detention, and Deportation. Once again, the LOM proved pivotal in this coalition. KDP activists were connected to solidarity activists, and immigrant and refugee rights organizers across the country through a mass organization affiliated with the LOM, the United States Anti-Imperialist League (USAIL). According to Geline Avila, in Washington D.C., these relationships were reinforced for groups affiliated with the Emergency Committee, since they shared the same office building.⁵¹ This led to a political crossfertilization between the groups, where their awareness of one another's unique experiences with the Cold War surveillance state allowed them to understand immigration, deportation, extradition law, as well as political assassination, as interconnected tools of controlling political dissent, of which, anti-imperialist diasporas were particularly vulnerable. As one KDP report put it, these various forms of "legal terror" were "the handmaid of U.S. foreign policy."⁵² As a result, an awareness of this broader political context of repression informed the CJDV's own definition of justice. This was evident as *Domingo v. The Philippines* approached a final verdict.

For the first four years of the litigation of *Domingo v. The Philippines*, CJDV members ran into a significant roadblock: "national security doctrine." Despite damning evidence that implicated the Marcos regime, as well as U.S. intelligence officials, judges consistently ruled that Marcos, as a representative of a "friendly foreign state" qualified for "absolute immunity due to sensitive national security and foreign policy considerations." By granting U.S.-supported regimes immunity in their ability to project repression into the U.S., it rendered anti-imperialist diasporas legally defenseless and gave the U.S. government a "blank check to violate the civil liberties of anyone challenging its broadly defined foreign policy."⁵³ This was a point the CJDV seized upon in their organizing. They tirelessly created forums and convened memorials for Domingo and Viernes that brought diverse communities of struggle together to collectively refine their critique of U.S. empire.

50. Coalition Against the Marcos Dictatorship (CAMD), "HR 6046 Violates Constitutional Rights, Update on Extradition Legislation," July 17, 1982, CDP, UWSC, Box 3, Folder 11.

51. Avila, Interviewed by Author.

52. Committee Opposed to the U.S.-R.P. Extradition Treaty, "Danger: Extradition."

53. "U.S. Pleads Immunity: What's at Stake in the Civil Suit Battle?," Call for Justice, March 1983, 2.

For instance, on April 30, 1983, Cindy Domingo captured the impact of a CJDV's sponsored seminar on "National Security," when she declared,

From the narrow experiences of one issue—the Domingo/Viernes case—we have now come to see that what we are really dealing with is U.S. foreign policy, and how 'national security' is used to suppress those who oppose the militarist, imperialist policy which gave rise to the murders and seeks to oppress human rights through-out the world.⁵⁴

While new political developments in the Philippines opened the door for the prosecution of Marcos, CJDV activists did not lose sight of what a wider conception of "victory" meant for anti-imperialist diasporas in the U.S.

In 1986, the formal end of Marcos's reign breathed new life into the CJDV's legal case. The following year, Marcos's new status before the law as a "private person" paved the way for him to be reinstated as a defendant in *Domingo v. The Philippines*. During a December 18, 1987 "victory party," where CJDV activists celebrated the new direction in the lawsuit, they acknowledged the precedent setting possibilities of the case. "Never before has a foreign dictator been put on trial for the murders of American citizens." Yet, their optimism was tempered by a broader landscape of repression. The late 1980s was a period where the Reagan administration's "support for right wing dictators and contra wars abroad" was matched at home with an "all time high" in "attacks on solidarity activists."⁵⁵ One of the most notable examples provided by the CJDV was the pending deportation cases of Palestinian immigrants in Los Angeles.

On January 26, 1987, seven Palestinians and the Kenyan-born wife of one were rounded up for deportation for their alleged membership in the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a claim that despite three years of intensive surveillance prior to their arrests remained unsubstantiated. More troubling was that their legal defense discovered a "secret INS and interagency memo" entitled "Alien Terrorist and Undesirables: A Contingency Plan." While government officials were quick to dismiss the report as nothing more than a "working paper," it foreshadowed a troubling sign of things to come for Arab American communities. The document called for a mass registration of non-immigrant aliens from Middle Eastern Countries, outlined an expedited process of deportation, and, at its most extreme, detailed plans for "housing as many as 5,000 aliens in tents at a site near Oakdale, Louisiana."⁵⁶ For the better part of 1987, the CJDV took significant steps toward supporting the "LA 8" and other solidarity activists. Most nota-

54. "CJDV Seminar Focuses on National Security Issue," Seattle Update, May 1983, 2.

55. "The Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes Invites you to...A VICTORY PARTY," December 18, 1987, CDP, UWSC, Box 4, Folder 7.

56. Judith Gabriel, "The Los Angeles Deportation Cases," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17.1 (Autumn, 1987): 119-120.

ble, was the CJDV's co-sponsored public talk, "Stop Political Deportations!" which featured one of the Palestinian activists who was subject to deportation, Kader Hamide. There, Hamide likely echoed comments he made in Los Angeles earlier that year when he defended his right to support the cause of Palestinian liberation.

"As a Palestinian, there is no way they can make me completely stop saying what I feel so strongly about my support for the Palestinian cause, for an independent Pal-estinian state. My support for the Palestine Liberation Organization is unwavering, and I will continue to express that...if that means jail, so be it, if that means deportation, so be it—I will not care."⁵⁷

As Hamide's comments indicated, the stakes of defending the civil liberties of the anti-imperialist diaspora were at an all-time high, regardless of the progress made by the CJDV's civil suit. In this context, it was the position of CJDV activists that a guilty verdict in *Domingo v. The Philippines* would send a powerful message, "Never again U.S. support for the Marcoses, Duartes, [and] Bothas of the World."⁵⁸

Conclusion

This article is far from a comprehensive account of the CJDV's activities. Rather, my main goal was to closely examine the ways CJDV activists built a multiracial movement that linked the political assassinations of Domingo and Viernes to a broader current of political repression, which particularly subjected anti-imperialist diasporas to diverse expressions of state violence throughout the 1980s. The CJDV brand of anti-imperialist solidarity did not obscure differences between the myriad struggles that were linked through their organizing. Rather, in the context of a rising political repression, CJDV activists understood that the best way to defend one's community is to expose the violence of the U.S. state and cultivate a broad base of supporters who, via their lived experiences and political consciousness, could easily identify with the CJDV's pursuit for justice and embrace it as their own. Moreover, through a close examination of the CJDV, I have labored to not only document the existence of solidarity, but also take progressive steps toward theorizing solidarity as a discursive and grassroots politics, what I define as a praxis of collective justice.

In the case of the CJDV, we can identify three important dimensions to their approach to solidarity. One, solidarity was pedagogical, in that it required anti-imperialist diasporas to learn from one another's

57. Ibid.

58. "Duarate" and "Botha" refer to the then ruling elites of El Salvador and South Africa respectively. "The Committee for Justice for Domingo and Viernes Invites you to...A VICTORY PARTY."

experiences. Two, it was organizational, in that it required the development of new political collectives that could fight for one another. Third, the organization's refusal to accept a narrow vision of justice models what we would identify today as an abolitionist stance in that they defined "victory" in ways that did not leave other anti-imperialist diasporas and the liberation movements they aligned themselves with behind. As our current moment eerily resonates with the repressive decade that CJDV activists operated in, their praxis of collective justice offers a useful model of solidarity for our times.