

Beyond the Shadow of Duterte

Understanding the Enduring Violence of the Philippine Drug War

Proceedings of the Public Lecture: "Revisiting the War on Drugs"

16 November 2023

Palma Hall 207

College of Social Sciences and Philosophy
University of the Philippines Diliman

Compiled by Maria Corazon C. Reyes

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UP CIDS | PROCEEDINGS

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“Protest mobilization against Oplan Tokhang (Philippine Drug War)
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ABOUT THE PROCEEDINGS

The University of the Philippines (UP) Department of Political Science and UP Center for Integrative Development Studies (UP CIDS) Program on Social and Political Change (PSPC) held a public lecture about the book, *Communal Intimacy and the Violence of Politics: Understanding the War on Drugs in Barangay Bagong Silang in Caloocan*, by authors Steffen Jensen and Karl Hapal.

The purpose of this event is to shed light on the violence that lingers in the Philippines even after the end of the Duterte administration. This public lecture draws upon the field research undertaken by Steffen Jensen and Karl Hapal. It offers a critical lens through which Filipinos may navigate the complex and unsettling landscape of Philippine society during the war on illegal drugs. Jensen and Hapal took a decade-long ethnographic journey into Barangay Bagong Silang in Caloocan City. As an urban poor resettlement community on the periphery of Manila, Bagong Silang provides a microcosm of the broader Philippine experience. The barangay, long relegated to the status of a “zone of exclusion and death,” served as a powerful case study, not just for understanding the brutality of the war on drugs, but also for dissecting the very conditions that allowed it to flourish.

The lecture commenced at 4:00PM and concluded at 5:30PM. Political science students, social workers, former UP students, and readers from various sectors comprised the primary audience. This lecture was documented by PSPC’s Senior Project Assistant, Ms. Maria Corazon C. Reyes.



- Pictured in front, from left to right, are Dr. Sol Dorotea R. Iglesias, Dr. Marco Z. Garrido an Associate Professor from the University of Chicago, Dr. Steffen Jensen, Prof. Karl Hapal, and Dr. Jorge V. Tigno, joined by alumni, political science students, faculty and other professionals.

Opening Remarks

■ Sol Dorotea R. Iglesias, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

Department of Political Science

University of the Philippines Diliman

This public lecture invites us to look into the unsettlingly intimate dimensions of violence within the Philippines’ “war on drugs.” We gather today to engage with the work of Karl Hapal and Steffen Jensen, whose book, *Communal Intimacy and the Violence of Politics: Understanding the War on Drugs in Barangay Bagong Silang in Caloocan*, offers a poignant and critical examination of this complex and tragic chapter in Philippine history.

Professor Hapal, an Assistant Professor at the College for Social Work and Community Development on this very campus, brings his expertise in local dynamics and community-based research to this lecture. His coauthor, Steffen Jensen, a Professor from the University of Aalborg, adds further depth and invaluable perspective to the analysis. Together, they weave a narrative that transcends mere reportage, offering a nuanced understanding of the war on drugs through the lens of “communal intimacy.”

This potent concept, introduced by the authors, goes beyond the mere physical proximity of densely populated neighborhoods like Barangay Bagong Silang. It explores the intricate web of shared histories, familial ties, and everyday interactions that bind residents together. This intimacy, the authors argue, becomes both a source of strength and vulnerability in the face of state-sanctioned violence.

The significance of Bagong Silang as the chosen location cannot be overstated. Barangay Bagong Silang, situated near the site of Kian Delos Santos's death,¹ is a name synonymous with the brutal realities of the war on drugs and serves as a potent microcosm of the wider struggle. By focusing on this specific community, the authors provide a microlevel analysis that sheds light on the broader macro level forces at play.

We are thankful to the Center for Integrative Development Studies for cosponsoring this lecture, particularly to Professor Tigno and his colleague Mariz, representing the Program on Social and Political Change.

So, without further ado, I hand it over to Professor Hapal.

¹ Kian de los Santos was an innocent 17-year-old victim of the drug war.

Lecture

■ Karl Arvin F. Hapal

Assistant Professor

College of Social Work and Community Development

University of the Philippines Diliman

The first presentation focused on explaining the war on drugs, not from a Duterte-centric perspective as many studies have undertaken, but rather by exploring the underlying conditions that enabled it at the grassroots level. Prof. Karl Arvin F. Hapal, from the College of Social Work and Community Development (CSWCD) of the University of the Philippines Diliman, presented his research that spans ten years of ethnographic work in Barangay Bagong Silang (or Barangay 176), Caloocan City. His study has three main themes: 1) the history of Barangay Bagong Silang, 2) the cases of violence in Bagong Silang before Duterte came into power, and 3) the circumstances under which the war on drugs in the barangay progressed.

Professor Hapal began his lecture by acknowledging a significant partnership with the local human rights organization, Balay Rehabilitation Center. He detailed that at the age of 21, he collaborated with Balay to document cases of children in conflict with the law, specifically those who had endured torture or even extrajudicial killings. His primary focus was Bagong Silang, the largest barangay in the Philippines and a notorious battleground for elections due to its immense voting power. In 2009, Bagong Silang housed about 250,000 residents and presented a peculiar image. While residents boasted of development with Jollibee franchises, banks, and 7-Elevens—amenities typically envied by rural areas—the history of displacement and resettlement remains.

Professor Hapal then discussed the historical formation of the barangay. According to him, many Bagong Silang residents had been forcibly relocated from Litex, a former informal settlement now transformed into an eight-lane highway. This relocation, part of the government's urban renewal campaign in the 1980s, involved brutal displacement, with the Philippine Marines overseeing demolitions and families crammed onto trucks.

Professor Hapal also detailed how Bagong Silang earned its ironic nickname “Toilet City.” He recounted an anecdote wherein the National Housing Authority’s callous instructions to the residents were: “Take your toilet, walk to your plot, bury it in your backyard—that’s your lot, now build a house.” These circumstances show the complex realities of Bagong Silang as a place marked by both development and the scars of displacement.

Professor Hapal proceeded to explain the start of his research on violence before the Duterte era. According to him, arriving in Bagong Silang was not a journey to witness relics of the past, like the fabled “toilet-seat era” two decades prior. Instead, it was an encounter with a community grappling with a stark reality: violence. Early on, the weight of this reality became palpable through a chilling account from a community partner: a recent killing, marked by a grim message plastered on the victim. While such incidents might resonate with the brutal “war on drugs” of today, it is crucial to recognize the evolving language and context of violence. He expounded that back then, it was known as “salvaging,” a term that carries its own historical baggage and demands nuanced understanding. The case of Aries stands out as a poignant example. He was not a typical victim. He was nicknamed “Pasaway,” a familiar term for someone involved in petty offenses. In addition, Aries had a history of run-ins with the police. However, one arrest proved tragically final. His body, discovered tortured and discarded on the outskirts of Bagong Silang, served as a brutal reminder of the human cost of violence. Driven by a desire to understand such tragedies, Professor Hapal, along with his colleague Dr. Steffen Jensen, embarked on a Victimization Survey in 2010. The goal is to measure the pervasiveness of violence in Bagong Silang. They visited houses to collect data, and the results were surprising. Only two percent of the population reported experiencing violence in the past three years, a figure far lower than initial impressions suggested and their initial reaction was confusion. The expectation was for a higher number, yet the quantitative data painted a different picture. This unexpected finding, however, served as a valuable catalyst for further exploration through ethnographic research.

Moving beyond the initial survey findings of surprisingly low reported violence, Professor Hapal dived deeper into individual cases that paint a more nuanced picture of the community’s struggle with violence. He shared Jason’s story that exemplified the brutality masked by the term “discipline.” Mistaken for a fleeing suspect, Jason was apprehended by an exhausted officer and was beaten at the police station. This “disciplining,” intended as punishment, tragically escalates, resulting in Jason’s death. Professor Hapal emphasizes that this incident highlights the intricate generational aspect of violence in Bagong Silang. He narrated that older men often assume the role of disciplining younger individuals, a practice intertwined with the complex moral framework surrounding state violence. An interview with a police officer underscores this perspective: “The people we put down are not people anymore. . . . We, the police, are like angels that battle those demons” (quoted in Jensen and

Hapal 2022, 63). This dehumanization and self-proclaimed “sacred mission” justify violence in the eyes of some, creating a fertile ground for the war on drugs to exploit.

Professor Hapal then returned to Aries’s case where the narrative takes a hopeful turn. Three years after his death, his family considered that they had finally achieved a semblance of justice after a family member won an election and became a *barangay kagawad* (councilor). This suggests a link between political power and access to justice in the community. In contrast, Jason’s family’s refusal of legal assistance highlights the limitations of formal justice and the enduring appeal of alternative routes like Raffy Tulfo’s television show, *Raffy Tulfo in Action* (RTIA), and radio show, *Wanted sa Radyo*. It speaks to the complex web of democratic authority within these communities, where traditional power structures coexist with official legal systems. Professor Hapal asserts that it is evident that understanding violence in Bagong Silang demands an in-depth analysis of individual cases, cultural norms, and power dynamics. The seemingly low survey numbers do not fully capture the nuances of everyday violence, in which discipline can blur with brutality and justice remains a multifaceted goal.

Continuing his exploration of violence in Bagong Silang, he narrated his research from the pre-Duterte era to the impact of his presidency. While initially horrified by the escalating violence, he noted that the targets remained consistent: young men, often out of school. This observation sheds light on the gendered nature of violence in the community. One stark illustration of this is when Professor Hapal shares a photograph of a young man lying lifeless. Allegedly a victim of accidental police gunfire, the man’s death was written off as mere “collateral damage.” The officer responsible remains free, highlighting the biased approach to justice, where some lives seem to hold more weight than others.

Professor Hapal then delved into the question of why the war on drugs during the Duterte presidency resonated most deeply in places like Bagong Silang. In stark contrast to the privileged havens like Forbes Park, these impoverished pockets bear the brunt of the violence. He aptly describes Bagong Silang as a *grim trifecta*: a circus zone, a dumping ground, and a killing field. This irony is evident in “Bagsak,” a local name meaning both “dump” and “downtrodden.” This aptly named area, once a dumping ground for demolished houses from Litex, now overflows with life, with excess families clinging to the precarious riverbanks of Marilao, Bulacan. Professor Hapal argued that Bagong Silang’s very existence is rooted in centralized planning gone wrong. Marcos’ authoritarian regime envisioned an “open city of land,” but in the process, it created a stark division between the included and excluded. This legacy of marginalization continues to haunt Bagong Silang, rendering its residents “surplus” and disposable in the eyes of both authoritarian and neoliberal forces.

This disposability is precisely what made their lives cheaper in the eyes of the Duterte administration. Professor Hapal contended that the war on drugs, with its focus on eradicating “unserviceable populations,” found fertile ground in these marginalized communities. In these communities, lives are seen as expendable.

Having explained the war on drugs’ impact on Bagong Silang, Professor Hapal broadened the lens. He emphasized that this phenomenon is not merely an exercise of raw state power, but a complex web where violence is interwoven with intimate relations, economic exchanges, and political dynamics. Drawing parallels, he pointed out how the war on drugs mirrors the Philippines’ counterinsurgency tactics used against communist groups and other “belligerent” entities. This observation suggests a continuity of violent state practices, albeit with shifting targets and justifications.

Professor Hapal ended his lecture by recognizing the intricacies of the web of violence. He then invited Dr. Jensen to take over and examine these interconnected factors affecting the war on drugs and its brutal consequences.

Lecture

■ Steffen Jensen, Ph.D.

*Professor of Politics and Society
Aalborg University in Denmark*

Senior Researcher

DIGNITY: Danish Institute Against Torture

Dr. Steffen Jensen's lecture explored the lessons gleaned from the war on drugs in Bagong Silang, and beyond. He mainly argued that the war on drugs can be interpreted as a brutal state-led transformation project inflicted on local communities through a spread of violence.

To examine his proposition, Dr. Jensen introduced a theoretical framework. He expounded that several scholars have analyzed the war on drugs as an act of sovereign power. Sovereignty, a cornerstone concept in political science, gained fresh theoretical ground with the publication of Giorgio Agamben's book, *Homo Sacer*. Drawing upon Carl Schmitt's² conceptual work, Agamben argued that sovereignty can be defined as the ability to declare an emergency, suspending the normal legal order. This sovereign act, in essence, declares the law inapplicable to certain individuals. As such, the sovereign operates outside the law. Dr. Jensen explained that Agamben famously stated, "He who can declare 'that I who am above the law, declares that there is nothing outside the law,' is the sovereign" (Agamben 1998, 29). Agamben further introduced another figure residing outside the law: the embodiment of the emergency. This figure, termed *homo sacer*, represents the "bare life" or the "naked man." In the context of the Philippine war on drugs, while Duterte claimed that he abided by the rule of law, some people, the *adik* and the drug pusher,

² Carl Schmitt was a German jurist, political theorist, geopolitician and prominent member of the Nazi Party.

were in fact outside the law and should be acted upon accordingly to save the rule of law. In this way, he made himself the sovereign while the embodiment of the emergency were the drug addicts. This theoretical framework that Dr. Jensen suggested, provides a lens through which to examine the war on drugs in Bagong Silang and potentially other contexts, offering valuable insights into the relationship among state power, violence, and the law during exceptional times.

However, Dr. Jensen asserted that the basic premise of their book is that the effects of the war cannot be deduced from its motivations. While acknowledging the relevance of motivations, he argued that solely focusing on President Duterte's intentions would be insufficient in grasping the full picture of what transpired in Bagong Silang. The approach of emphasizing sovereign power as the primary explanatory model is seen as prevalent in academic interpretations of war. He proposed a contrasting perspective, suggesting that the war on drugs, and state violence in general, should be understood as inherently relational. This does not negate the importance of sovereignty. It rather highlights the need for a more nuanced analysis that goes beyond a singular focus on centralized power. Therefore, the two approaches are presented as complementary, offering different but valuable insights into the complexities of state violence. He further explained that this is a step towards a more comprehensive understanding of such phenomena.



- Dr. Steffen Jensen giving his lecture on the war on the drugs and the concept of communal intimacy in Bagong Silang.

Thus, Dr. Jensen argued that understanding the war on drugs requires a relational perspective, focusing on the production and transformation of social relations rather than solely examining the policies themselves. He cites Janet Roitman, an American anthropologist, who emphasized this approach by suggesting the examination of the effects of policies on social networks. Dr. Jensen gave an example of this transformation with the production of watch lists, which often evolved into kill lists. These lists were primarily compiled by members of the barangay justice system, particularly the *purok* or area leaders. Professor Jensen has described this system, with its long history in the Philippines, as a multifaceted entity. On one hand, it is an order-maintenance system, enforcing gendered and generational hierarchies (older men disciplining women and children). On the other hand, it is a political machine serving barangay captains and mayors. While acknowledging the potential for accountability, transparency, and community care within the system, Dr. Jensen highlighted how the war on drugs drastically shifted its dynamics. However, he continued that the gendered and generational aspects, the role as cogs in a political machine, and the intimate knowledge of the local area all contributed to the barangay justice system becoming the primary frontline agents of the war on drugs. In this way, the policy actively transformed social relations, blurring the lines between community service and state-sanctioned violence.

Dr. Jensen further provided some empirical flesh to the relational perspective he asserted. He narrated his encounter with Kenny, a former fraternity member who had witnessed killings in Bagong Silang. He and his long-time friend Maria met Kenny and his father in Bagong Silang in May 2017, while they were “sitting in the rain under a tree” in one of the walkways that make up life in the area (Jensen and Hapal 2022, 63). Dr. Jensen recounts this experience:

Kenny’s father told us about a killing he had witnessed across the road in which ten police had shot and killed a local drug pusher. “He was trying to escape by climbing one of the poles,” he told us. “The police said he was resisting arrest. I guess he was, but he was not posing a threat. They just killed him.” Purok Tan, a local barangay official, had put the drug pusher on the list. The pusher was far from the only person that the official had put on the list. This is when a young man who had joined us muttered that maybe this could cause the violent demise of Tan: “Maybe Purok Tan will not survive for so long . . .” Kenny’s father, who worked under Tan as a community guard, concurred hesitantly, caught as he was between the young man and the local leader. (Jensen and Hapal 2022, 63)

The anecdote that Dr. Jensen detailed illustrates how embedded the drug war is in communal intimate affairs. This led Dr. Jensen and Professor Hapal to think about communal intimacy as a necessary conceptual lens through which to understand the effects of the war. They see communal intimacy along three axes. The first axis is intimacy, which is often used to refer to the most intimate family and kin relations. In Bagong Silang, the densely interwoven network of local connections and relationships fosters a unique form of communal closeness. However, this intimate knowledge of one another can be both an advantage and a burden. The awareness of what others hear and see necessitates careful navigation through silences, rumors, gossip, and occasional conflicts. This dynamic exemplifies intimacy at a communal level that reveals a dual nature as both life-sustaining and potentially threatening.

The second axis is the notion of communal sphere, further evoked ideologically through the emic concept of *pakikisama*. Without delving into this concept's extensive history, its usage in Bagong Silang connotes a specific, largely positive ideal of communal interaction. Though undoubtedly crucial to forms of community solidarity, *pakikisama* inherently carries gendered aspects tied to generational and local class hierarchies. Notably, older men of a certain standing who hold the power to define and enforce the ideals of *pakikisama*. This role is often played by figures like the *tanod* and the *purok* leader, exemplified by the father of Kenny and his superior, Tan.

Finally, intimacy as object of governance. Anthropologist Ann Laura Stoler argued that studying intimacy is not about ignoring power structures but rather relocating their conditions and examining their relationship and forces of production. Applying this lens to the war on drugs, Dr. Jensen asserted that we can see how it exploited preexisting intimate relationships and structures within communities. The state and police, knowingly or not, leveraged these communal bonds to reach and impact individuals' most private lives. While introduced externally, the war on drugs operated through and alongside deeply ingrained notions of gendered and generational intimacy within local communities. Understanding this interplay between communal intimacy and political violence is crucial to comprehending the war's full impact.

Dr. Jensen then returned to discuss the barangay justice system and describe his fieldwork. In 2017, at the peak of the Philippines' war on drugs, he interviewed several *purok* leaders in Bagong Silang to understand their involvement. Some, like Purok Tan, embraced the cause with fervent support. However, most found themselves caught in a precarious middle ground. Ate Malou exemplified this dilemma. Dr. Jensen recounted that during a meeting with her, she vehemently denied compiling any lists of suspected drug users. Leaving her to her duties, they turned to Karl, a local resident and trusted friend. "She's making lists," Karl confided in a hushed tone, "she just won't admit it" (quoted in Jensen and Hapal 2022, 51). Dr. Jensen then narrated another field work where they

were accompanied by Karl to go around his area and seek insights into the mysterious list. When asked for discretion, Karl would whisper, “Psst, house with red gate on the corner, on the list” (quoted in Jensen and Hapal 2022, 51). Despite his confident assertions, he insisted he had not seen the list himself. In this way, the list became a shadowy entity, fueled by fear, speculation, and whispers. It embodied the community’s anxieties about the state’s reach and their own potential vulnerability. Karl further mused “If I were the state, Kuya Ambeth would be on the list!” (quoted in Jensen and Hapal 2022, 51). He proceeded to identify over twenty houses near his own that he believed Ate Malou had marked for suspicion.

With his extensive field research, Dr. Jensen asserted that the cases of Purok Tan and Ate Malou, two barangay officials in Bagong Silang, highlight the entanglement of policing with intimate, communal relationships during the war on drugs. While the core dynamics of local power and patronage remained, the war drastically reshaped its parameters. He explained that before the war, *purok* leaders and *tanods* were crucial cogs in political machines, navigating complex relationships with their patrons and communities. This was never risk-free, but the war’s arrival brought a new level of danger. The government essentially “weaponized” the barangay justice system, relying on it to identify and target suspected drug users. Their preexisting ties to the community, once a source of influence, became instruments of surveillance and control. This weaponization of the barangay justice system created a volatile environment. The violence was unpredictable, often blurring the lines between victims and perpetrators. The constant pressure to comply with political patrons placed barangay officials in a precarious position, facing potential repercussions from both sides. These dilemmas and risks were not limited to barangay officials. Every resident of Bagong Silang, to varying degrees, faced similar choices and anxieties. However, the officials, due to their position at the nexus of community and state, became a stark embodiment of how communal intimacy came to relate to the war and the violence of politics. Dr. Jensen noted, “They reacted very differently to these dilemmas, whereby some bought into the war with fervor while others were much more cautious and worried” (Jensen and Hapal 2022, 52). Dr. Jensen thinks “that the war played into and was fought along predictable lines of gendered violent politics at the same time as it inaugurated reconfigured forms of communal intimacy that may be the lasting effects of the war” (p. 53).

Dr. Jensen then discussed two important lessons from the war on drugs, which he described as large-scale state violence. First, the war on drugs is not the only project of state violence fought through relationality in the Philippines, and it will not be the last. Similar processes can be observed in the red tagging of activists and in various insurgencies, particularly in Mindanao. Consider *rido* (clan wars), often characterized as a network of intimate, horizontal clan conflicts seemingly independent of state counterinsurgency efforts. However, a closer examination reveals a more nuanced reality.

While the state did not invent *rido*, its manipulation of these preexisting conflicts through selective armaments of opposing sides arguably served to weaken resistance to Manila's dominance in Mindanao. In essence, the state actively facilitated *rido* violence, exploiting existing communal and intimate relationships as instruments of control.

The second point Dr. Jensen posits is how to counter projects of state violence. While accountability through justice for victims and perpetrators remains crucial, it alone may not address the profound effects of state violence on intimate, communal relations within communities and between residents and local institutions. Countering these projects requires a different approach that seeks a deeper understanding of the social fabric and empowers local actors. He then shared a recent project he was involved in Bagong Silang, "Following the Child," which might offer a potential pathway. This initiative aimed to establish and sustain a child-centered approach to juvenile justice. Instead of focusing on individual institutional responses to children at risk or in conflict with the law, "Following the Child" adopted a holistic approach. It followed children from their families through their interactions with law enforcement, whether leading to discipline or detention. Notably, the project also sought to mobilize and organize both parents and children, empowering them to become active advocates for child rights.

Further explaining the project, which was launched at the tail end of the war on drugs, Dr. Jensen said that it faced a challenging environment. Tensions ran high, with communities harboring a deep distrust and fear towards state institutions. Years of government suspicion towards children and youth had further eroded any sense of common ground. Additionally, antagonisms between human rights organizations and the national government, fueled by the latter's negative portrayal of non-government organizations (NGOs), added another layer of complexity. Despite these initial hurdles, the project found an opening through local government units (LGUs). Recognizing the potential benefits of child protection measures for their own communities, LGUs became early supporters. Dr. Jensen said that this collaboration proved pivotal when one government official, amidst a moment of understanding, exclaimed, "Now I understand; it's for the children (*para sa bata*)."

This seemingly simple statement held immense weight, marking a shift in perspective. Seeing the children involved not as criminals but as individuals in need of support opened doors for collaboration with previously hostile institutions.

Dr. Jensen finished his lecture by describing how the project actively engaged children in conflict with the law and those at risk through a unique storytelling initiative. These narratives served not only to document their experiences but also to offer explanations and context, fostering empathy and understanding. This "transformative engagement," as it was termed, deliberately steered away from tactics like naming and shaming government officials. Instead, it prioritized dialogue and collaboration. This approach, while likely benefiting from the project's focus on children, may also hold broader lessons

for addressing the aftereffects of the war on drugs. Dr. Jensen asserts that the complex web of relationships within communities, shaped by factors like age and gender, as well as the fractured trust between residents and the state, could potentially be mended through similar strategies of empathetic engagement and collaborative dialogue. This possibility, however, requires further exploration and careful consideration.

Dr. Jensen thanked the audience and proceeded with the open forum.

Open Forum

The Legitimization of the War on Drugs

A fourth-year UP Diliman political science student raised a critical question regarding the presentation on the war on drugs. He noted the potential parallels between the “othering” of drug addicts and the historical marginalization of groups like Jews under Nazi rule. This othering seemed to justify the war on drugs as necessary for upholding the rule of law, even at the cost of eliminating individuals deemed harmful. He asked if the residents actually cared about the rule of the law, as he assumed that many of them did not know much about their rights, among other things. He also asked how this dynamic played out in Bagong Silang.

Dr. Jensen replied that, while the assumption that residents of Bagong Silang would not necessarily prioritize the rule of law holds true, their research suggests that relationality played a far more significant role in shaping the residents’ engagement with the campaign. Instead of viewing the war on drugs as solely about establishing a category of “outsiders” to the rule of law, he argued that it was driven by complex local dynamics referred to as relationality. He explained that in their observation, older men often seek to legitimize their own participation and leverage existing social structures and relationships to justify the violence against young men. This becomes evident in the survey they conducted. This survey showed that despite a general perception of young people as the primary perpetrators of violence, young men were predominantly the victims of violence perpetrated by older figures within their own community. Thus, young men are established as outside the rule of law and hence disposable.

Dr. Jensen further explained that this confrontation between generations served as a crucial mechanism for legitimizing the violence against young men. Older people label younger people as the source of violence. This label justified targeting them, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of fear and aggression. Therefore, both supporters (the *tanod*, the *purok* leader) and opponents of the war on drugs were primarily driven by relational dynamics rather than abstract legal concepts. He recounts one resident’s fear that stemmed from witnessing the actions of *purok* leaders, highlighting the deeply personal

and relational nature of the experience. However, to entirely dismiss the rule of law would be inaccurate. While not the primary motivator, a sense of justice and fairness informed individuals' actions. The rule of law, though not a central concern, still played a subtle role in shaping perceptions and motivations.

Professor Hapal also offered his answer, relating it to the Philippine COVID-19 pandemic response. He said that similar dynamics can be observed with the emergence of the *pasaway* construct. This label was applied to young men seen as loitering, justifying their detention. The underlying assumption was that by removing them from public spaces, violence and disorder would be prevented. This approach, while invoking legal authority, primarily served to enforce social discipline and generational control. While the law provided a veneer of legitimacy, it was not the driving force behind the implementation of these measures.

Insights from a Resident, International Organizations, and the Church's Role

One of the members of the audience shared her insights as a resident of Bagong Silang. Recalling the disturbing reality of 2016, she described frequent traffic disruptions due to bodies found on public roads—a grim occurrence regardless of whether one traveled by private vehicle or public transportation. She inquired whether Dr. Jensen and Professor Hapal looked into the role of the church, which she felt deserved to be mentioned in the book. Being the largest barangay in the Philippines, Bagong Silang is a complex and diverse community, and she acknowledged the potential limitations of any study encompassing its entirety. However, she emphasized the church's pivotal role in providing sanctuary and support to drug war families, even amidst challenges such as the five-year lease limit on burial plots for victims. She also mentioned that grassroots organizations stepped in to assist families facing this difficult reality.

Furthermore, the resident also expressed her disappointment at the lack of references for Amnesty International's research. She believed the organization's findings shed light on the crucial connection between the intensity of the war on drugs in Bagong Silang and the alliance formed between local government officials and then-President Duterte. She argued that this previously nonexistent connection emerged during the 2016 election campaign and significantly impacted the community's experience. Despite acknowledging the valuable insights gained from the lecture, the resident emphasized that it only scratches the surface of the problem. She highlighted again the diversity within the community, noting that not everyone was equally affected by the war on drugs due to factors like economic class. This disparity, she argued, deserves further exploration within the context of seemingly unified spaces like the church.

Dr. Jensen responded by acknowledging the insights of the audience, and he agreed that the discussion on Bagong Silang under the war on drugs sparked further clarifications. While acknowledging the potential criticism of not emphasizing the church's role, he confirmed its inclusion in their research. He highlighted a key informant whose support for the war on drugs stemmed from religious convictions, illustrating the complex interplay between faith and violence.

Furthermore, Dr. Jensen referenced a separate article exploring the diverse forms of resistance to the war on drugs, coauthored with Anna Bræmer Warburg. This research identified the church as a crucial source of vocal opposition in a context where overt resistance was often challenging (Warburg and Jensen 2020, 23).³ Beyond the church, he argued that communal relations themselves served as a source of solidarity and identity, particularly in the face of shared hardship. This intimacy was both a lifeline and a potential threat, depending on the circumstances. To illustrate this duality, Dr. Jensen cited their research on the microlevel dynamics within Bagong Silang. Survey results revealed a high degree of trust within immediate neighborhoods, with 95 percent of respondents affirming trust in their neighbors. However, a subsequent follow-up by Professor Hapal revealed a nuanced understanding of this trust. Respondents acknowledged the inherent limitations of trust and emphasized the importance of taking precautions even within close relationships. Their research indeed underscores the complex coexistence of closeness and tension within communities, highlighting the need for a multifaceted understanding of social dynamics in Bagong Silang.

Professor Hapal seconded Dr. Jensen's explanation and offered to give electronic copies of the book. He mentioned that they used to live in Phase 5 (of Bagong Silang). Additionally, he resided somewhere in Phase 7 for a time and conducted surveys in areas near Phase 1, Phase 2, and similar phases.

In relation to Professor Hapal's comment about their areas of fieldwork, he further discussed Phase 12 of Bagong Silang. Representing a later phase of development, Phase 12, according to Dr. Jensen, holds significance in the context of displacement politics. Notably, this area was primarily known as a Muslim community, and he was forbidden to enter during their previous visits. However, during the war on drugs, access became surprisingly allowed. Upon visiting Phase 12, he and his colleagues encountered a peculiar situation. Houses stood empty, and their inhabitants fled to Mindanao due to violence. One

³ Anna Bræmer Warburg and Steffen Jensen, "Ambiguous Fear in the War on Drugs: A Reconfiguration of Social and Moral Orders in the Philippines," *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 51, no. 1–2 (2020): 5–24, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463420000211>

resident, acting as a caretaker for one such deserted home, revealed a surprising detail: while the area was notorious as a drug hub, killings rarely occurred there. Instead, arrests were the norm. This observation aligns with another critical aspect of the research—the financialization of the war on drugs. Dr. Jensen emphasized how the cost of staying alive, of avoiding arrest and persecution, skyrocketed during this period. The war on drugs, beyond targeting addicts, became a lucrative enterprise for certain actors, with police officers like *buwayas* (crocodiles) and *lintas* (leeches) exploiting the situation for personal gain. Examples abound. Interviews conducted by their research team revealed instances where police, unable to apprehend husbands or fathers, resorted to detaining daughters and initiating extortion. This exploitation often took on a gendered dimension, involving sexual favors alongside financial demands.

The Multifaceted Impact of Duterte's War on Drugs and Moving Forward

Another member of the audience, also a resident of Bagong Silang, an activist, and development researcher, offered personal insights. Recalling previous online communication during their undergraduate research, they expressed concern about the Duterte administration's portrayal of the war on drugs as a success. Highlighting the stark contrast between official claims and the lived experiences of Bagong Silang residents, particularly the urban poor, they pointed out that the literature and their own research demonstrate how the war on drugs disproportionately victimized the community. The suffering extended beyond immediate deaths. Families were included on watch lists and had to endure long-term trauma. They noted that reports claiming the project's success often neglect the devastating long-term consequences for families. The participant inquired how Dr. Jensen and Professor Hapal confronted this alleged success of the war on drugs project by the Duterte government. The presenters were asked whether they had encountered coping mechanisms or practices created by the community during their ethnographic work.

Another student posed two questions. He acknowledged the book's author and the lecturers' focus on how communal intimacy can breed violence. However, he proposed an additional perspective: communal intimacy as a potential source of counter violence. He cited the example of communist insurgencies utilizing close communal ties to organize resistance movements. In this vein, he posed the question: "In communities already plagued by distrust between neighbors, and despite support for the war on drugs, how can counter violence emerge from these intimate relationships?" Furthermore, he expressed interest in reframing the narrative surrounding the war on drugs. While the dominant discourse portrays it as an exercise of state sovereignty, they advocated for framing it as an act of state

terrorism. Beyond efforts toward holding Duterte accountable through the International Criminal Court (ICC) and civil society networks, he also inquired about effective strategies for engaging the public sphere and presenting the war on drugs as such.

One member of the audience also asked a question about policies on social order and state intervention. Reflecting on Dr. Garrido's presentation, an earlier lecture, he noted a potential disparity in social disorder experiences between the upper and lower classes in Metro Manila. While the upper class might encounter ambiguity in the application of rules, their desired social order, based on observations and policy preferences, seemed to lean towards increased rule-based frameworks and rational structures. They aspired to models like the welfare states of Singapore or the Nordic countries. However, this vision may not align with the aspirations of communities like Bagong Silang. Drawing from the research conducted by Dr. Jensen and Professor Hapal, he pointed out that people in Bagong Silang might not desire a state that intrudes into their intimate relationships, even if it means imposing social policy through those very relationships. This raises the question if social policy should be designed to be more responsive and harness the existing desire for *pakikisama* (warmth and connection) within such communities.

Another student inquired about the residents' perceptions during Dr. Jensen and Prof. Hapal's ethnographic research. They were curious whether Bagong Silang residents or those associated with the community expressed any level of support for Duterte and his war on drugs during the 2016 elections when Duterte emphasized his plans regarding drug addicts and criminals. Additionally, the student sought to understand whether there were any shifts in this support, if it existed at all, towards the administration and the war on drugs during the peak of its violence.

Then, a UP alumna and development worker in Bagong Silang offered insightful comments and questions. She also conducts research within another urban poor community. She recognized the patterns highlighted in the presentation, particularly the concept of communal intimacy and its manipulation to justify the notion of "surplus population" within these communities. She shared that the experience resonated with her, confirming the broader applicability of these observations beyond Bagong Silang. Her question focused on the current situation under the new administration. Given the pronouncements of "lifting of fear" and increased cooperation with the United Nations Joint Programme (UNJP) and former senator Leila de Lima's release, the alumna sought clarification on whether these developments signify a genuine shift or merely mask the persistence of a violent culture. She inquired whether Marcos's cooperation and de Lima's freedom indicated a true departure from the fear-ridden climate or if this culture might continue to permeate Filipino society.

Dr. Garrido, who also delivered an earlier lecture on the same topic, expressed his appreciation for Dr. Jensen and Prof. Hapal's book. Dr. Garrido highlighted its insightful focus on local structures and their mobilization within close-knit communities during the war on drugs. He expressed particular curiosity, however, regarding the motivations behind this mobilization. His question is built upon a broader observation: despite being disproportionately affected by the violence of the war on drugs, many communities, as surveys showed, exhibited increased support for the campaign. Dr. Garrido, therefore, sought insights into the "why" behind this seemingly paradoxical phenomenon, complementing the detailed exploration of the "how" in Dr. Jensen and Prof. Hapal's research.

As a response, Prof. Hapal first addressed the concept of "lifting of fear" under the new administration. He expressed skepticism, suggesting a transformation of fear rather than its true disappearance. He then cited examples of police shifting from extrajudicial killings to extortion, exploiting their power to arrest individuals for minor offenses and offering reduced sentences or alternative charges in exchange for bribes. This transformation, he argued, highlights the enduring pattern of police brutality, with the "angels" of supposed order morphing back into the feared "crocodiles" of extortion.

On the social contract of violence, Professor Hapal further explored the complex relationship between fear and support for Duterte's war on drugs. He proposed that it was based on a specific social transaction. Duterte's promise of predictable, almost scientific violence, where only "deserving" individuals would be targeted, resonated with some segments of the population. This framing, regardless of its factual accuracy, allowed for a certain detachment from the violence, leading to a tacit acceptance of the "disposability" of marginalized groups like "*mga latak ng lipunan*" (dregs of society). This, he argued, echoed the rationale behind the social support for enforced push-ups against "*pasaway*" (wandering youth) during the pandemic, as such punishment was seen as justified against a deserving target.

Turning to coping mechanisms, Professor Hapal commended the work of NGOs like Balay in organizing and supporting families affected by the drug war. He highlighted a group of women who had come together to provide mutual support and solace. He also acknowledged the individual strategies of displacement, with some residents choosing to leave Bagong Silang due to the unbearable pressure within the community. Finally, he mentioned the church's role in facilitating various initiatives to help residents navigate the trauma and hardship.

Dr. Jensen also responded to the insightful questions, starting with Dr. Garrido's inquiry about the mobilization of intimate networks in the war on drugs. He asserted that the most compelling answer lies in its effectiveness. He challenged the oft-repeated narrative of a weak Philippine state, arguing that its strength lies in its ability to maintain power.

While lacking in areas like good governance, the state excels in self-preservation. He highlighted the central role of the Philippine Constabulary, a paramilitary army with a 130-year history of counterinsurgency, as the core of the police force. He noted that even within the police academy, this legacy is acknowledged. This enduring institution, despite its perceived shortcomings, demonstrably excels at maintaining power.

Furthermore, Dr. Jensen emphasized the lack of attention paid to the police, particularly in relation to Duterte's focus on counterinsurgency. He argued that Duterte recognized the effectiveness of counterinsurgency strategies, evident in the striking similarities between the war on drugs and standard counterinsurgency manuals. In addition, he pointed to the crucial role of Mindanao in shaping the war on drugs. He described the "circulation of strength" and personnel between Mindanao and Manila, where officers deemed corrupt were sent to hone their skills in the southern region before returning to the capital. This constant exchange served to further solidify the counterinsurgency approach.

Expanding on governance, Dr. Jensen acknowledged Kusaka's work on different social spheres and his argument that discipline was a key factor in the war on drugs' support within urban poor communities. He then explained the phenomenon of mistaken identities, where individuals would acknowledge the presence of drug users in their communities but maintain that specific victims were wrongly targeted. This, he argued, reveals a fascinating internal displacement of disorder within these communities, where the violence is externalized onto specific individuals deemed "deserving." He further described that the residents were sort of putting the disorder somewhere else, someone like Kuya Ambeth and somebody else who really deserved it.

Dr. Jensen emphasized the significance of this internalization in understanding the unwavering support for Duterte, even among those directly affected by the war on drugs. He also acknowledged the complex emotions surrounding the issue. For instance, some of his friends in the media, while acknowledging the war's mistakes, still expressed support for Duterte.

Continuing the discussion, Dr. Jensen acknowledged the possibility of communities hoping for broader change during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, he emphasized their lack of formal organization at the time. Instead, individuals relied on existing patterns of communal solidarity, a double-edged sword that simultaneously offered sustenance and posed potential dangers. He underscored the fundamental need for such intimacy, stating that no one can thrive without it.

On the question of desires and aspirations, Dr. Jensen shifted the focus to political preferences. He argued that urban poor communities ultimately yearn to be seen and acknowledged. Unlike those accustomed to rational forms of politics, urban

poor communities have experienced minimal success with such approaches. While acknowledging a potential element of unfairness in this statement, he pointed out how the state and academic research often abandon these communities to their own coping mechanisms. This, he suggested, contributes to their feeling of invisibility, seen only by politicians during electoral seasons.

Concluding his remarks, Dr. Jensen asserted the possibility of a society that supports the underprivileged. He challenged the notion that “rational politics for the poor” is synonymous with extortion, calling for alternative visions of political engagement that address their specific needs and aspirations.

Professor Hapal agreed and offered the audience to contact him through email for the electronic copy of the book.

Closing Remarks

■ Jorge V. Tigno, DPA⁴

Professor

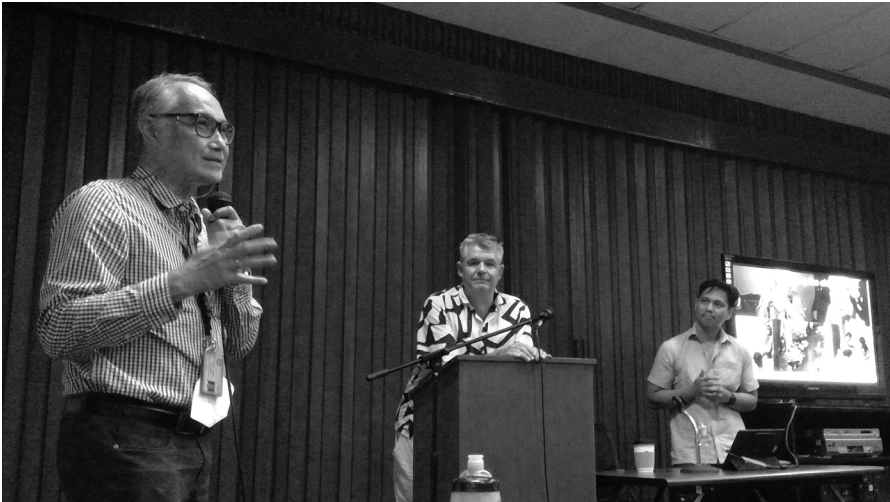
Department of Political Science

University of the Philippines Diliman

Thank you. I'm actually wearing two hats here, one as the Co-Convener of a program in the Center for Integrative and Development Studies which is called the Program on Social and Political Change. The other hat that I'm wearing is as the spokesperson, representative of the Department of Political Science. Now, the reason why we wanted to be part of this as [UP] CIDS is that, at the PSPC, we have this kind of RTD [roundtable discussion] activity on the war, and the title is "*Are We There Yet? What it Will Take to Win the Philippine War on Drugs?*" One of the key findings that we have in the activity that we initiated under that program is that when you place your campaign or crusade, as the case may be in the drug war, when you base it on a body count, it's always a moving target. This event this afternoon, sort of gives another dimension by situating it within a specific community. I'd like to thank Karl and Steffen for speaking to us about your book and your work, and we hope that this kind of conversation continues. Speaking now as part of the Department of Political Science, it's really an event that is welcome to all of us, especially to the students, when we look at these different burning issues that confront us these days. As a token of our appreciation, I'd like to present you with some publications from [UP] CIDS. These are not pirated; they're free to download from the website.

Maraming salamat po.

⁴ Jorge V. Tigno was the Co-Convener of the Program on Social and Political Change of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies at the time of the event.



- Pictured are Dr. Jorge V. Tigno delivering the closing remarks. Pictured also is Dr. Jensen and Prof. Hapal.

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Annex



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES DILIMAN
COLLEGE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND PHILOSOPHY
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES
CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES
PROGRAM ON SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

PUBLIC LECTURE: REVISITING THE WAR ON DRUGS

16 NOVEMBER 2023 (THURSDAY) | 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

College of Social Sciences and Philosophy Audiovisual Room - Palma Hall 207
University of the Philippines-Diliman, Quezon City

Over a year has passed since former president Rodrigo Duterte stepped down from power. The killings resulting from anti-illegal drug operations have not stopped. How do we make sense of the persistence of violence? Drawing from their book *Communal intimacy and the violence of politics: Understanding the war on drugs in Bagong Silang, Philippines*, Steffen Jensen and Karl Hapal offer an explanation based on nearly 10 years of ethnographic work. Rather than reducing the war on drugs to Duterte's murderous ways, the lecture explores the conditions that allowed it. The lecture does this by looking at barangay Bagong Silang, an urban poor resettlement site North of Metro Manila that has long been a zone of exclusion and death. The lecture discusses how the war on drugs is not some exogenous phenomenon that descended on places like Bagong Silang. Instead, communal relations in Bagong Silang, mediated by gerontocratic and patron-client authority structures, provided the conditions where the war could unfold and escalate. It asks, what are the repercussions of the war in places like Bagong Silang, not least at the cusp of the barangay elections. The lecture also discusses various methodological challenges, particularly encountering and studying violence in the field, and engaged scholarship for social justice and human rights.



Steffen Bo Jensen, PhD

Professor, Global Refugee Studies, Department of Politics and Society
Aalborg University and
Senior Researcher at DIGNITY-Danish Institute Against Torture (former RCT)

He has published extensively on state and non-state violence, human rights, urban studies as well as displacement and confinement. He has done extensive field work in Marseille, Cape Town and Manila.



Karl Arvin F. Hapal

Assistant Professor, College of Social Work and Community Development
University of the Philippines, Diliman

Prior entering the academia, he worked as a researcher for a human rights organization in the Philippines. His fields of interest are human rights, violence, community development, and community organizing.

For more information, email srglesias@up.edu.ph

- The concept note and pubmat of the public lecture.

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