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REVIEW

Quinsaat, Sharon M. *Insurgent Communities: How Protests Create a Filipino Diaspora*. Ateneo de Manila University Press. xx, 226 pp.

What is a diaspora, and how are diasporas constituted? This is the key question that Sharon Quinsaat's engaging and timely book, *Insurgent Communities*, insightfully addresses. Combining ideas and concepts drawn from social movements, migration, citizenship, and memory studies, the author makes a novel argument that diasporas are not created mainly by the presence of multitudes of migrants who have left their "homelands" for various host countries. Neither do diasporas arise because of a presumed primordial tie that migrants maintain with their countries of origin. Rather, diasporas, Quinsaat argues, are constituted when migrants develop a collective identity, a sense of a shared "we," which in turn, can arise through social mobilization and transnational activism on issues they consider important in their homelands or host countries.

Quinsaat carefully fleshes out her theoretical arguments via a broad comparison of Filipino migrant communities and the activist campaigns they pursued in the United States and the Netherlands from the 1970s to more recent times. Through interviews with these migrants, an examination of migrant newsletters and literary writings, and historical discussions, Quinsaat traces how, in the case of the US, the political exiles and activists who fled the Philippines during the repressive Martial Law era organized themselves into groups and coalitions in US cities, seeking to mobilize Filipino migrant communities against the Marcos dictatorship in the so-called homeland. In time, however, these mostly middle-class activists found themselves engaging with second or third generation migrants of different class origins and status. These included children of Filipino farm workers and domestic helpers, for whom issues of discrimination, the lack of rights, and underinclusion in their

host countries were a constant source of grievance. The same was true in the Netherlands: although antidictatorship activists got involved in host country issues facing migrant workers early on according to Quinsaat, they too, were confronted with the challenge of building solidarities with Filipino migrants in the Netherlands, such as seafarers and low-skilled workers, whose life histories and political socialization differed from their own.

In these contexts, Quinsaat demonstrates the making of diasporic communities as being intertwined with the shaping of a collective identity—a sense of a "we" where migrants see both host country and homeland concerns as valuable, and at times, interconnected, and where they develop a stake and responsibility to act on both arenas. Interestingly, as Quinsaat deftly writes, the migrants themselves experienced surprising personal transformations in such process: for instance, some antidictatorship political exiles developed greater sensitivity to their co-migrants' local struggles around invisibility and "otherness," while economic migrants came to better see how their current vulnerabilities in their host societies are connected to broader policies, including those emanating from a repressive Philippine government.

As a whole, *Insurgent Communities* makes several important contributions to studies on social movements, migration, diasporas, citizenship, and the role of memories in post-authoritarian societies. Its central argument—that political mobilization and social movements matter in the process by which diasporas are created—is important for two reasons. On the one hand, it calls attention to processes that are well established as crucial markers of movement building, such as the making of a collective identity, which facilitates collective action especially among diverse constituencies. But what is different in this book is that it situates collective identity-making processes not only in host countries' migrant communities. It examines such processes in relation to political events in the migrants' countries of origin, as well. In this sense, the making of a collective identity is being unpacked across two fields—at the so-called national level in the host country, and at the transnational level, that is, in relation to migrants' so-called homeland.

Thus far, scholarship has been growing on transnational advocacy movements or networks forged across national borders around specific issues. What has not been adequately explored is how migrants participate in such transnational advocacy networks and under what circumstances they may do so. Insurgent Communities, in this sense, invites us to consider how the making of a collective identity that allows migrants to identify or reidentify with their home countries politically, may be one of the crucial ingredients undergirding their decisions to participate in transnational advocacy networks that are acting on their homeland's issues.

Aside from demonstrating the different fields in which collective identities can be forged among migrant communities, the book is also notable for shedding light on the specific mobilization activities of these

diasporic communities. Through this book, we now have, thankfully, more documentation on how overseas Filipinos engaged with and contributed to the anti-dictatorship cause during the Marcos regime. This is particularly important as efforts to "reinvent" our past so as to gloss over the intense social inequalities and political repression that marked this period, continues to this day. This book thus adds another layer to remembering, allowing us to draw lessons and insights on how overseas Filipinos, whether they see themselves as "exiles" or simply migrants, sought to overcome their differences in order to act more meaningfully and collectively on these issues.

But this discussion in the book also prompts several questions. As the author already noted, through the actions of the antidictatorship movements in the US and the Netherlands that were directed on the Philippines or certain institutions within their host countries, we get a glimpse of a remaking of "citizenship," that is, an affirmation that the making of an inclusive, rights respecting society—and thus the critique of regimes or governments that try to foreclose this—does not have to happen solely on so-called national ground. Citizenship, in other words, can also be exercised outside of the "national" or the nation. While this in itself is an important insight, it also calls attention to the political weight that can be exercised by overseas migrant communities and diasporas.

For some time now, we have been hearing the idea that migrant communities can seriously shift the character of politics in the Philippines. That being less tied or beholden to political patrons or political families, they can likely tilt Philippine politics toward a more progressive, issue- or platform-based one through their votes or voice. This book suggests that while the potential for spearheading political change is present, its likelihood of being realized depends on the organizing, consciousness building, framing, and collective identity-making processes of social movements within these migrant and diasporic communities themselves. This is a sobering, but powerful reminder of the role of organizing and sociopolitical mobilization once again for diasporic communities to realize such potential, and become significant agents of progressive change in the so-called homeland.

Finally, the book is important for the insights it provides on the memory work done by migrants who became part of the transnational antidictatorship movement centered on the Marcos dictatorship. As the book suggests, memory work can be very salient and potentially potent in accountability campaigns. In *Insurgent Communities*, we see how the stories of the generation that left the Philippines that were told and retold in these movements' networks, about what life was like during the dictatorship, helped keep a spirit of vigilance alive. It was this vigilance that in turn was activated in these communities' own campaigns against the elder Marcos's burial in the Libingan ng mga Bayani (National Heroes' Cemetery) during Rodrigo Duterte's presidency. Such experience seems emblematic of the profound impact that persistent memory work, in the form of memorials and acts of remembering, has played in societies seeking

to build more democratic and inclusive political practices and institutions after enduring various forms of nondemocratic rule. In some countries like Chile, and indeed even in the Philippines, it has been remarkable to see how young people from generations that did not directly experience these societies' authoritarian regimes, have been spearheading such memory work, daring societies not to forget life-changing events of the past and the lessons they hold. For migrants, the framing role of memory work as they live their lives in another land, and the impact that such work gets to manifest in crucial moments like the Marcos burial issue, suggests once again how migrant and diasporic communities too, can remain significant voices in the "homeland." It also shows how acts of remembering can forge persistent ties of caring about the past and future of these societies.

In sum, *Insurgent Communities* makes several important theoretical contributions, which in turn speak to some of the most salient issues of our times. Rich in insights from the field, and grounded squarely on relevant scholarship, it is a timely, insightful, and delightfully well-written book that deserves to be widely read.—**TERESA R. MELGAR**, Professor, Department of Sociology, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines Diliman

[This is a revised version of a commentary given by the author during the launch of *Insurgent Communities*, 3 June 2025, Pilar Herrera Lecture Hall, Palma Hall, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, sponsored by the Third World Studies Center and the Ateneo University Press.]