Book Review

A Time to Rise: Collective Memoirs of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP), edited by Rene Ciria Cruz, Cindy Domingo, and Bruce Occena. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2017. Pp. 330. ISBN 9780295742021.

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During its founding on 24 April 1973, the National Democratic Front (NDF) of the Philippines released a call for international support for the Philippine revolution: "To the American people, we issue a special appeal: Resolutely oppose the leaders of US imperialism for supporting and abetting the Marcos fascist regime. Stop them from converting our country into another Vietnam" (*Kalayaan International,* 24 April 1973). Simultaneously, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and the NDF sent messages to Filipino nationals in the US who were former members of Kabataang Makabayan, Samahang Demokratiko ng Kabataan, and the underground communist movement in the Philippines on the need for a united front organization in the US to support the revolutionary struggle.[1] Through the leadership of Cynthia Maglaya, Bruce Occena, and Melinda Paras, about 70 young radical Filipino and Filipino-American activists formed the Katipunan ng Demokratikong Pilipino (KDP; Union of Democratic Filipinos) in Santa Cruz, California on 27 July 1973. KDP was the only anti-martial law organization that fought transnationally on two fronts: against the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines and against capitalism in the US. The connection between authoritarian rule in the Philippines and monopoly-capitalism in the US was a recurring trope that KDP deployed, not only to capture the ideological underpinnings that guided the organization, but also to reflect the lived experiences of its members. This linkage is a key theme in *A Time to Rise: Collective Memoirs of the Union of Democratic Filipinos (KDP)*, a collection of narrative accounts written by former KDP activists.

A Time to Rise is divided into four parts. In the first part, "Beginnings," the authors connected the life histories (biography) of activists to the larger institutional context (history) as they shared their initial involvement in activism. This is followed by "In the Thick of the Struggle," which provides a snapshot of the day-to-day operations of the KDP and its intersection with the personal and ideological growth of activists. The murders of Silme Domingo and Gene Viernes, and the subsequent ruptures in the daily lives of activists due to the possibility of transnational repression are the subject of the third part, "The Test of Fire." The book concludes with "Looking Back," where the authors reflect on how the KDP has shaped their overlapping identities as Filipinos, activists, migrants, parents, friends, and many more. In all four sections, the stories give rich and textured descriptions of cross-border activism that allow the reader to understand the micro-dynamics of mobilization and the agency of activists—that is, how social movements emerge and develop because of the choices that individuals make.

The stories highlight the emotions that activists dealt with and managed as they confronted challenges to their activism and how often spontaneous decisions were made based on individual instincts. For instance, Jeanette Gandionco Lazam in her chapter titled, "Who is Marshall Law?," recalls how she overcame her anxiety and took the risk of smuggling antigovernment propaganda for her comrades in the US (pp. 28–33). When she was stopped by agents at the Manila International Airport, she used her privilege as an American citizen to protest the inspection of her luggage. Conquering fear is also a theme in Sorcy Apostol's story, "No Aloha for Marcos" (pp. 92–8), of her facing up to Ferdinand Marcos during his visit to Hawaii in 1979 and cursing him when he discredited the protesters as not being Filipino because "they can't even speak our language, they're Americans!" (p. 97). By shouting expletives in Tagalog, Apostol proudly performed her Filipino identity and stood up to the dictator. In "We Had Already Lost Too Much to Turn Back" (pp. 216–23), Terri Mast recounts the emotional toll of worrying for the lives of her daughters after the assassinations of Domingo and Viernes. Similar to the stories of Lazam and Apostol, she juxtaposes fear with courage, especially in the context of collective action:

> Of course, it wasn't just about terror. I've come to understand how it's possible to be afraid and act courageously at the same time, mostly because we were so damn mad at what

> they'd done to us. And as I mentioned earlier, the support of the union membership became very tangible and real. (p. 221)

Feelings of discomfort, ennui, and guilt are recurring motifs in the activists' storytelling. From Therese R. Rodriguez's remorse for leaving the Philippines in the thick of repression and her confusion about her purpose in New York City ("To Teach the Masses a Love for Bach, Chopin, and Beethoven" pp. 23–7), to Walter Yonn's recognition of his "elitist tendencies" when he was transferred from the Bay Area to the poor neighborhood of Kalihi in Honolulu, Hawaii ("Transfer to Paradise... Not!" pp. 104–9), the anecdotes reveal how activists, through interactions with their comrades, which range from conflict to accommodation, perceived their social location within the Philippines and the US, shaping their thoughts, habits, and practices in the movement. These emotions are also found in the stories of activists visiting the Philippines for the first time, where a disjuncture between ideology and reality became apparent. For instance, in "In the Armed Struggle" (pp. 172–88), Ka Linda recalls her transformation when she went to the Philippines to join the New People's Army. Her experience in the countryside allowed her to reflect on the dominant role of armed struggle in the movement and whether and up to what extent this was rooted in realities on the ground. She writes,

> My original romantic views regarding armed struggle had dissipated. Years of organizing and study, in the course of the KDP's work, had broadened my perspective considerably. I still viewed armed struggle as the most important arena for fighting the Marcos fascist dictatorship, but I no longer believed in principle that it was highest form of resistance, always and forever. I had begun to think that victory would lie in the party's capacity for utmost political flexibility in shifting to different forms and arenas of struggle, depending on changes in the international situation and the deepening crisis of the Marcos regime. (p. 175)

Thus, the stories show that ideological work in social movements is a dynamic social process characterized by breaks, ruptures, and reflexivity. While being indoctrinated in the writings of Karl Marx and Jose Maria Sison through study groups and political discussions are necessary, they are not sufficient to explain the activists' espousal of socialist and national democratic ideology. Equally important

are the conflict and interrogation, and the subsequent processes of interpretation and negotiation of theoretical knowledge and lived experiences.

This dynamism is further articulated in the stories about the importance of a dual strategy in the KDP. For the NDF, the KDP should focus its efforts on the Philippines, since Filipinos would be repatriated after victory. Amado David in "Why Me?" (pp. 164–71) recalls his visit to the Philippines in 1982, right before May Day, to meet with the Kilusang Mayo Uno (KMU; May First Movement). In explaining the necessity of the struggle for national democracy in the Philippines *and* socialist revolution in the US to comrades at the KMU, David was met with bantering about Filipino-Americans being "steak commandos" who have become too comfortable with American consumer culture. David's trip validated his doubts on the primacy of Maoism and a protracted war strategy as well as the role of Filipino Americans in the movement: "We played a secondary, supportive role, which was mainly to provide material and human and moral support to the struggle" (p. 167). Other accounts echo how activists made sense of their experiences, whether in the Philippines and the US, and the often disconnect between theory and reality within the movement.

The stories in *A Time to Rise* tell us that the personal is political and that activism is often messy, fluid, and volatile because the choices that activists make as part of a collective impact their individual lives. The book, therefore, makes an important contribution to the literature on social movements. In addition, documenting the stories of migrants and refugees, and understanding the process of collective storytelling allow us to think of marginalized communities as active producers of knowledge and not just as objects of study. The preservation of these stories is the bedrock of future research on underrepresented groups. *A Time to Rise* should be read not only for the ideas and themes within the stories but also for the manner in which they are told and the motivations and expectations of storytellers. By doing so, we can understand the "lifeworlds" of storytellers and the interconnectedness of these narratives.

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Note

1. Bruce Occeña, interview by Sharon Quinsaat, San Francisco, CA, USA, August 13, 2014.