

**UNDERSTANDING
FILIPINO
MIGRATION**

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Introduction

Filipinos are a mobile people. Pre-Hispanic Filipinos were described by Scott (1992:12) as a "vigorous and mobile population adjusting to every environment in the archipelago, creatively pondering local variations in response to resources, opportunities and culture contacts, able to trade and raid, feed and defend themselves." Centuries later, Filipinos continue to turn to migration in response to dire conditions in the homefront or the promise of a better life elsewhere.

This special volume, *Understanding Filipino Migration*, brings together research papers written between the 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by extensive movement of Filipinos both within the country and beyond its borders. The papers included in the present volume tackle the contexts and outcomes of recent Filipino migration experience. In general, the studies are based on small scale samples which allow for a more refined analysis of the nature and character of migration. Certainly, some of the issues and concerns of more contemporary migration have changed from what had been described in an earlier period. Some historical notes are needed to better appreciate current realities.

Historically, the United States has witnessed two waves of Filipino migration, each of which is associated with different groups of Filipinos. The first wave – from the early 1900s up until 1965 – consisted mostly of men with low educational background; they were recruited as agricultural workers in Hawaii and the West Coast. The second wave – those who came to the United States after the immigration reforms of 1965 – initially consisted of professionals who were later joined by their families. Over time, family reunification became the defining characteristic of Filipino immigration – and generally, Asian immigration – to the United States. *Gloria Nelson* and *Calvin Goldscheider* examine one aspect of Asian Americans' adaptation in American society, i.e., their occupational adjustment. For better or for worse, Asian Americans have been hailed as America's model minority because of their better-than-average

occupations and incomes. The authors consider two major questions in their paper: the relationship of human capital resources (particularly English usage) to the socioeconomic gains of Asian Americans, and the paths to occupational success of various Asian American groups. Despite the diversity of Asian Americans, education (and not language) turned out to be a common factor in the occupational success of all Asian American groups.

By the 1980s, the Philippines has become a major labor exporter in the Asian region, sending workers over 100 countries. This recent wave of international migration is qualitatively different from Filipino immigration to the United States because it is temporary in nature. Two papers deal with some aspects of recent international labor migration – *Arnel de Guzman's* and *Jorges Tigno's*.

The paper by Arnel de Guzman on the work and life situation of Filipino contract workers is based on fieldwork the author conducted in Saudi Arabia. De Guzman attempts to give a comprehensive picture of the experiences (lives, work and struggles) of Filipino workers in a foreign land, and how these experiences shape their consciousness. The second aspect was important for de Guzman because the research project also aimed at identifying means to organize and mobilize Filipino workers to weather the hazards of overseas employment – “be it pangs of loneliness and homesickness, maltreatment or *pambabastos* from the employers, or the ‘weirdness’ of Saudi culture” (p.1). Through all these, the workers did not perceive themselves to be oppressed or as forming a “class-in-itself”. Such a perception, according to de Guzman, suggests that the starting point for organizing workers may derive not from workers’ identification as a class but from other sources of identity.

Jorge Tigno’s paper highlights the ascendance of Japan as a major importer of Filipino workers. Japan maintains a closed-door policy with respect to foreign workers but Filipino entertainers, mostly women, have found their way to the country. Tigno describes the macro factors that led to the entry of Filipino workers to Japan. He also outlines the social and human costs of this labor exodus to both the Philippines and Japan.

Turning to internal migration, the paper by *Aurora E. Perez* and *Imelda Z. Feranil* provide some answers to what employment opportunities migrant women can find in Metro Cebu (one of the country’s countermagnets to Metro Manila). Filipino women have been noted to be as migratory as men, and have been observed to dominate migration to urban areas (Eviota and Smith, 1984: 165). The occupational adjustment of migrant women, however, seems to vary depending on the

type of urban area they enter. Koo and Smith (1983:229) found that among migrants, more women than men were more likely to enter the informal sector (mainly, personal services) which does not promise much occupational mobility. The involvement of women in the informal sector was associated with lower earnings in Manila but not so in secondary cities (Koo and Smith, 1983: 230). In Trager's study of migrant women in a secondary city, migrant women were employed in a wider variety of occupations. As such, women may have more room for occupational mobility in a secondary city than in a primate city. In another urban context such as Metro Cebu, the paper of Perez and Feranil reveals another interesting pattern: occupational mobility differs not only between migrants and non-migrants, but also between short-distance and long-distance movers.

The paper by *Belen T. G. Medina* explores patterns of outmigration from a village. Based on in-depth information from 22 families, she traces the paths of migration of its members to various destinations – other areas within the same province, to Metro Manila, to other provinces and overseas (including contract workers to Saudi Arabia and emigrants who left for the United States) – and the underlying reasons for the various moves. In many ways, the migration processes that characterize this small village mirrors the changing character of migration in other parts of the Philippines.

What happens to migrants once they find their way in urban areas has also invited considerable research. In the absence of real opportunities in the urban centers of developing countries, many migrants find themselves without housing and without employment. Slums and squatter settlements are symbols of the unfulfilled promises of urban areas. They have also been imbued with a culture that breeds despair and disorganization as popularized by Oscar Lewis' culture of poverty. That a community is possible in this environment has been advanced by later scholars. The case study of *Leticia A. Lagmay* of a migrant's community in Kaingin II, Pansol considers the psychological and cultural aspects of migrant adaptation. Lagmay finds that the social structure of the slum community is one that is cooperative in nature. Furthermore, she suggests that migrants' psychological orientation helps overcome a life marked by "extreme lack of material resources." Instead of being weighed down by poverty, migrants generally display an attitude of mild ascendance.

Filipinos on the move continue to weave their own stories which may affirm, challenge or change not only how we approach the topic of

migration. In a larger sense, migration is likely to affect our lives, individually and collectively. In internal migration, the cities continue to attract migrants, but so do the uplands and areas with coastal borders. In international migration, even as hundreds of thousands of Filipino contract workers legally leave the country every year, an unknown number leave as undocumented workers who become subject to many vulnerabilities in foreign shores. Many migration scholars anticipate that undocumented migration, along with refugee migration, will be on the increase in the coming years. As the world becomes smaller, even if some of us do not become migrants, we will not be left untouched by the opportunities and threats that accompany this social phenomenon.

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