

“Katas ng Saudi”*: The work and life situation of the Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia

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Introduction

Since the oil boom of 1973, Saudi Arabia has been the single biggest employer of Filipino skilled and unskilled labor. The *katas ng Saudi* syndrome¹ has become part of the lives of so many of our people. Most of the contract workers in the 1970s and 80s came not from the ranks of the unemployed, inexperienced or unskilled, but from the skilled, highly educated, young and healthy, already employed and experienced sectors of the populace.

The Philippine government responded to the heavy labor outflow by institutionalizing and regulating Filipino labor outmigration. A bureaucracy was established, i.e., the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and, later, the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), to compel Filipino overseas contract workers (FOCWs) to remit a large percentage of their earnings through authorized banking channels (by means of Executive Order 857 of ex-

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¹This refers largely to the predominance of consumer goods, including utility vehicles purchased from incomes gained while working abroad and prominently displayed for the public to view. Aside from stainless jeepneys with nudguards painted “*Katas ng Saudi*” or “*Pawis ng Diyerto*”, are blaring stereo components, decorative carpets, and jewelries made of Saudi gold.

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President Marcos). These agencies also aggressively sought out additional markets for Filipino labor abroad.

The recent phenomenon of massive Filipino labor outflow started in the early 1970s when the oil-exporting countries of the Middle East increased the price of oil. The sudden increase in the price of oil as agreed upon by the member countries of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) enabled these countries to amass huge profits and subsequently execute massive construction and infrastructure projects. With the sudden increase in their national wealth, Arab countries found the opportunity and capital to implement industrial and welfare programs that were necessary for their accelerated growth and development. But, as in the case of Hawaii during the American colonial period, the local Arab populace could not meet the burgeoning demand for skilled and manual labor. This led the oil and capital-rich Arab states to embark on a massive labor importation program.

The Philippine government took advantage of the labor shortage in the oil-rich Arab countries. It began to export labor on a grand scale primarily to address the growing balance of payment (BOP) deficit and to provide employment for the growing labor force which the Philippine economy could not accommodate.

The official government position is that the export of human labor will be allowed only as a temporary measure to ease underemployment and will be increasingly restrained as employment opportunities improve in the local market. This will ensure the availability of talents and skilled labor needed to raise production efficiency in all sectors of the economy.²

In practice, however, the policy of promoting labor outmigration has been aggressively pursued with little consideration of its long-term social and economic impact. The government has maximized labor export in an attempt to alleviate the economic crisis which has gripped the country since the late 1970s, causing high unemployment and widening BOP deficit. While the government encourages workers to be deployed abroad, it enacts continuously more stringent legal and institutional controls over workers's remittances and actual deployment.

Numerous studies, one-shot surveys and in-depth interviews have been conducted among Filipino workers returning from Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. However, reviewing the existing literature, not a single

²See National Economic Development Authority (NEDA), *Philippine Development Plan 1978-1982* (Manila: NEDA, 1982).

study has been done to describe comprehensively the life and work situation of the Filipino contract workers in their adopted environment, as told from their own point of view. For one thing, no Filipino sociologist has been permitted to visit the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in part because the fundamentalist Muslim culture has created a closed society that does not issue any tourist visa. In fact, no one can enter the kingdom without a Saudi guarantor. Only three types of visa are normally issued: for work, for business and for Muslim pilgrimage or *haj*.

This research did not arise from purely scholarly interests. It was initiated in line with the efforts of a nongovernmental organization – the Friends of Filipino Migrant Workers or KAIBIGAN³ – to arouse, organize and mobilize the Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia.

The overriding concern was the possibility of organizing the Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs) in Saudi Arabia. At the time the study was conducted, there were more than 90,000 Filipino OCWs in Saudi Arabia, the largest concentration of OCWs in the world, after the Filipino immigrant population in the United States. Needless to say, KAIBIGAN views the overseas Filipinos, particularly the OCWs in Saudi Arabia as an important sector in Philippine society that can contribute to the movement for social change.

However, before the OCWs can be organized, they must first be understood well. The key question, therefore, is how and in what form can OCWs be organized?

In order to devise an appropriate plan of action a social investigation was made of the living and working conditions of the workers, the opinions of the workers themselves and their relations with fellow workers.

Some of the crucial questions were actually quite basic: for example, what is the actual living situation in Saudi Arabia? What does the place look like? What are the conditions in the work place? How do workers spend their day? What concerns or conflicts do they face? How do they respond to these? How does working and living away from their country and family affect their perceptions? What are their aspirations in life? What motivates them to endure or cope? What are their views of government, politics and the Philippine Embassy? What are their

³KAIBIGAN is a Manila-based service institution founded by the author in 1981 to provide support programs for the advancement of the rights and welfare of overseas Filipinos. Its programs include public information and education, research and policy advocacy, community development, campaign and networking, and welfare assistance.

perceptions on religion, sexuality and relations with co-workers, Filipino or otherwise?

This action-oriented exploratory study is thus, a social investigation of the work and life situation of Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia, based primarily on their own observations. This research attempts to depict how it is to live in an environment totally different from that with which most Filipinos are familiar. It also shows how the Filipino overseas contract workers, who are predominantly male, reflect upon their lives.

In the process of describing their lives, work and struggles, it is possible to see how and why contract workers undergo changes in consciousness. For instance, if work constitutes the life of Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia, how do they view the work situation? What effects would the work environment have on their way of thinking? Given a situation where no religion besides Islam is tolerated, how does this affect the predominantly Catholic Filipino workers in the kingdom? How do they cope when the dominant religion is so different from their own? Another intriguing consideration is, whether the workers, in their months and years of being together, can see themselves beyond the level of personal and emotional relations? That is, are they able to see and identify the common thread that binds them all politically as workers? Can they perceive themselves as belonging to a specific "class" situation in the Weberian sense of sharing a location "with those who are similarly placed in the process of production, distribution and exchange?"¹⁴ In short, has there been a class identification or what the British sociologist Michael Mann describes as "the definition of oneself as working-class, playing a distinctive role in common with other workers in the productive process"¹⁶

The thesis here is that contract workers are constantly affected and changed by their situation. The conflict between wanting to earn more dollars and wanting to return to the warm embrace of their families and native culture produces certain changes in their perceptions, feelings, thinking and beliefs.

Engels said that "the influences of the external world upon man express themselves in his brain, are reflected therein as feelings,

¹⁴W.G. Runciman, "The Three Dimensions of Social Inequality," in *Social Inequality*, Andre Beteille (ed.), (Suffolk, Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 47.

¹⁶Michael Mann, *Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class* (London: British Sociological Association, 1973), p. 13.

thoughts, instincts, volitions."¹⁶ For contract workers, the external world, or the factual conditions in which they exist, is essentially the work and life situation in the far-flung desert Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Theoretical framework

For the theoretical discussion, several hypothetical positions are taken. The most basic is that Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia act within the framework of a capitalist mode of production. According to Marx, the social structure is characterized by the presence of two economic classes, one, the bourgeoisie which appropriates the product of the other, the proletariat's, work. Elaborating on this, Wesolowski contends that "this kind of class relationship is tied to the distribution of goods according to the 'principle of distribution based on property'. When this principle is in operation, a person does not need to work in order to take his share in the distribution of economic goods or even to enjoy the privileges of this distribution."¹⁷

The debate about whether or not migrant workers (overseas contract workers included) and the indigenous workers form two different strata within the working class can be resolved by looking at both as sharing the same position in the mode of production, i.e., "they are excluded from ownership or control; they are forced to sell their labor power in order to survive; they work under the direction and in the interests of others. In the sphere of consumption both categories of workers are subject to the laws of the commodity market, where the supply and price of goods is determined not by their use value but by their profitability for the capitalists."¹⁸

The second position underscores the relationship between the means of production and other determining variables of class consciousness. To quote Wesolowski again, "the relationship to the means of production forms class consciousness by determining the level of income and status in the social organization of work. The amount of income acts upon class consciousness in terms of possibilities it

¹⁶Frederick Engels, *Ludwig Feuerbach and the Outcome of Classical German Philosophy* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), p. 30.

¹⁷W. Wesolowski, "The Notions of Strata and Class in Socialist Society," in *Social Inequality*, Andre Beteille (ed.), (England: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 133.

¹⁸Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, "Immigrant Workers and Class Structures," in *An Introduction to Sociology*, Robert Bockock, et al. (eds.), (Glasgow: The Open University Press, 1983), p. 128.

represents and in terms of social prestige."⁹ This departs from the mechanical, economic deterministic and class reductionist view of the orthodox Marxists.

In the actual world of Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia, variables such as their level of income, degree of job security, opportunity for upward mobility, their position in the process of production, motivations for working abroad, labor laws, cultural differences and relations with other social groups, affect and change their perception, behavior, thinking, physical, mental and emotional makeup. Needless to say, determination by multiple variables is not a simple causal relation producing direct changes but a complex process of seemingly arbitrary relations and unpredictable results. In reality, dependent and independent variables are at once perceived by the person, some with immediate effects and reactions. Others, meanwhile, are internalized for a time until they emerge in attitude and behavior.

Marx, in the often misinterpreted quotation, asserts that life determines consciousness.¹⁰ In a dialectical fashion, the consciousness imbued in individuals also have a bearing on the kind of life they live. As Castles and Kosack noted, the objective economic factor is not the only determinant because considerable emphasis is also put on the subjective factor in the formation of class consciousness.¹¹

This study not only looks at the existing relations of production, but also attempts to see how Filipino OCWs are affected by the superstructures, such as the cultural milieu, Muslim practices, labor laws and other social relations.

Conceptual framework and operationalization

The situation of Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia can be described in three main areas. The first is the factual, external condition of the place or the environment in which the workers live and work. The second is the perception of the workers themselves on several aspects such as their aspirations, politics, religion and sexuality. The third is the social relations among fellow workers, both compatriots and foreign

⁹Wesolowski, 1974, p. 124.

¹⁰Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), p. 21.

¹¹Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, "Immigrant Workers and Class Structure," *op.cit.*, p. 301.

workers. Here, questions of class identity, ethnicity, class interest and international relations are explored.

The work and life situation of the contract workers can be described in terms of the courses of action undertaken by the workers in response to their given situation, which would not be the "normal" response to another situation. Here, we can apply Schutz's postulate from the *Phenomenology of the Social World*: If A, B, C are contract workers, then their behavior is oriented to a certain action-model M, that is, the action expected of a contract worker.

For the Filipino contract workers in Saudi, the most influential variable on their response system, or the goal to which their actions are directed is the pursuit of higher income through contract work. In the pursuit of this goal, the workers enter what Lockwood would call objective "market and work situations"¹² such as the size of income, the degree of job security, the opportunity for upward mobility, the structure of production and its ensuing relations, the level of technology and the Islamic labor laws. Such "market and work situations" would affect the workers's consciousness so that their behavior would be oriented according to the intensity of the external stimuli. The workers tend to be more conservative and "bourgeois," less assertive of their rights and less likely to be organized if income is relatively high and the work situation is not unbearable. Questions arise as to how the sociohistorical, political, cultural and physical environment, the working conditions (which include income and benefits, job security, upward mobility and relations in the production process), living conditions and Philippine government services, have all affected the workers in terms of their willingness to be organized and assertive of their rights.

The second plane of investigation focuses on how OCWs reflect on their lives. This entails detailed studies of the workers's aspirations, changes in lifestyle, political views, religious beliefs and practices and sexual behavior.

The typical course of action is the logical response to a particular objective situation. Take sexual behavior for example. The long deprivation of sexual activity due to extended separation from the spouse plus the prevalence of very conservative sexual norms, logically results in certain types of sexual behavior like masturbation and even uncommon sexual practices such as implanting small bearing balls

¹²David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness* (London: Unwin University Book, 1969), p. 15.

(*bolitas*) in their penis, lining up (with fellow male co-workers) for sexual intercourse with a prostitute and others. These variables have an impact on the workers's consciousness.

The third plane of investigation focuses on the social relationship among workers. Schutz said that there is social relationship when two people become reciprocally oriented toward each other.¹³ The action of the individual in relation to a fellow human becomes social "insofar as, by virtue of the subjective meaning attached to it by the acting individual(s), it takes into account the behavior of others and is thereby oriented in its course."¹⁴ If prolonged association with other persons sharing the same role in the production process produces an identification of belonging to a certain social class, then perhaps OCWs develop a sense of "class consciousness" during their time together. The presence of contract workers of other nationalities poses still another interesting issue as to how the Filipino OCWs respond. For example, do they see themselves as a distinct race and is there more solidarity as workers or as Filipinos? Finally, the investigation will determine whether they are aware of their class interest.

The interplay of these three main aspects, i.e. objective conditions, workers's own perception and social relations, plus the workers's individual socioeconomic background, shapes their consciousness. Workers's consciousness should be defined by a progressive set of indicators: willingness or action to assert their rights as workers, to join workers's organizations and to participate in collective action and possession of relatively progressive political views (as opposed to conservative or reactionary). "Progressive" is defined here as nationalist, anti-dictatorship and conducive to social change. Signs of conservatism in workers's consciousness include accepting their position and amassing whatever economic gains they can get, a tendency to always refer back to the Philippines and seeing no need to change the situation because their experience of it is temporary.

Methodology

The basic methodology of the study is focused group interview and participant observation, which Ramos-Jimenez describes:

¹³Alfred Schutz, *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 189.

¹⁴Alfred Schutz, p. 189.

In participant observation, the investigator participates in the daily life of the group or community under study, either openly in the role of a researcher or covertly in some disguised role, observing things that happen, listening to what is said and interviewing people over some length of time. This method is concerned with the sociocultural and psychosocial aspects of human behavior as well as with behavior itself. Its objective is maximum understanding of human behavior in context. Although it is guided by theoretical assumptions of a preconceived research design, it is not, however, slavishly bound to them.¹⁵ (Underscoring supplied.)

A specific technique of participant observation used in this study was the observer-as-participant approach in which the researcher does not conceal the fact that he is conducting research but, as much as possible, avoids direct participation in group or community activities.¹⁶

Data was also gathered through extensive, in-depth, unstructured interviews with several key informants, focused group discussions, content analysis of primary and secondary documents, still photographs and videos whenever possible, recordings of almost every interview and a daily diary. An interview guide (see Appendix A) was prepared for discussions with the workers. A friend and co-worker from KAIBIGAN assisted in all these undertakings. He also served as a sounding board and analyst of the people, places and events encountered in the process of gathering data.

For a period of almost one month, from November 21 to December 17, 1984, the writer and a fellow researcher traveled to the major cities of Saudi Arabia: Jeddah, Riyadh, Dahrhan, Dammam and Al-Khobar. The researchers stayed, lived, ate, discussed with Filipino overseas contract workers in their jobsites and villas. The researchers introduced themselves as writers of a book, commissioned by the Catholic Institute for International Relations (CIIR) based in London, England, about the lives and work of migrant workers.

Direct observation with in-depth, unstructured interviews were the main instruments of the study. The idea here was to let the subjects speak freely mindful of Peter Lloyd's admonition that "questionnaire

¹⁵Pilar Ramos-Jimenez, "Participant Observation," in *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods*, Ma. Lourdes S. Bautista and Stella P. Go (eds.), (Manila: Research Center, De La Salle University, 1985), pp. 106-107.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 108.

responses, divorced from any reference to specific situations, are unreliable predictors of behavior."¹⁷

The researchers met and talked with more than 100 people from various occupational categories. From this total, in-depth unstructured interviews with forty people were reconstructed in a chapter of this study to provide an organizational format and quantitative picture of their socioeconomic demographic profile.

The forty workers that were interviewed came from 23 companies. More interviewees inevitably came from Jeddah because their main contact was based in Jeddah and because it is difficult to move outside of Jeddah without certified permission from the employer or sponsor to buy a bus ticket for Riyadh and the eastern provinces. According to reliable statistics, Jeddah contains only 30 percent of the total Filipino population in the kingdom. There is, however, not much difference between the conditions in Jeddah and those of other places in Saudi Arabia.

Most often, the interviews were conducted after work in the privacy of the workers's living quarters in their villas. However, there were also instances the workers's lunch break at the jobsite was the only available time for an interview. Each interview lasted from two to three hours. There were cases that required return visits for follow-ups or elaboration of the discussion.

Six key informants provided valuable information for the research. The main contact and another worker, both of whom had been in Saudi Arabia for almost seven years and were doing organizing work for KAIBIGAN, provided extensive information and numerous insights that became invaluable to this study. Moreover, their flat-mate, an accountant for a sports shop, helped with data and also served as our guide and driver in Jeddah. The key informant for Riyadh was a former student activist in the University Belt area. Another one was a banker who is the brother of a colleague in KAIBIGAN. The key informant from the Eastern Province was a computer analyst also doing work for ARAMCO.

Five groups participated in the focused group discussions: seven male aluminum and marble fitters; four male cooks and waiters (one was a gay man named "Grace"); four female nurses working at Erfan's Clinic; four men working as pre-cast construction workers; and five male maintenance workers from Dallah Establishment. All focused group discussions, except those with the female nurses, were conducted in the

¹⁷Peter Lloyd, *A Third World Proletariat?* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982).

homes of the workers, in the evening, after work and after supper. Each discussion lasted more than five hours and was simulated to be their regular *bangkaan* (story-telling session) for that week. The discussion with the female nurses took place in the flat where the researcher was staying. It lasted the whole afternoon until supper time. The nurses were picked up by a contact from their villa on their day-off.

In terms of the Philippine government, an extensive interview was conducted with Ambassador Jonathan de la Cruz, director of the Labor Center for Middle East and Africa, and Atty. Reynaldo Parungao, Labor Attache of the Philippine Embassy in Riyadh.

Whenever possible, the study uses existing studies to compare and support certain points. Likewise, the study also uses textual analysis of written communication such as letters and poems, especially those published in the *Pinoy Overseas Chronicle*, the only widely-circulated publication in Saudi Arabia for Pinoy workers. The researcher also read the only two English daily newspapers published in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Gazette and the Arab News, which contain highly political debates about the rule of Marcos, the remittance issue and the Muslim secessionist movement in Mindanao. There are also regular news about the latest Philippine Basketball Association games, anti-Marcos demonstrations and the like.

Content analysis of twenty issues of Saudi Gazette and twenty issues of the Arab News were done to illustrate the Filipino contract workers' perceptions of the news on the Philippines that reaches Saudi Arabia. These publications were incorporated in the data gathering process because "language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness."¹⁸

The living and working conditions in Saudi Arabia

Imported labor in the "Land of the Prophet"

Arriving in Saudi Arabia, whether at the King Abdul Aziz International Airport in Jeddah or at the international airports in Riyadh and Dammam, gives one a strange feeling of being transported back to

¹⁸T.B. Bottomore and Maximilien Rubel (eds.), *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy* (Great Britain: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 85.

the Arab world of the Middle Ages. The discomfitingly dry and hot (38 degrees centigrade in summer) desert weather and hissing breeze hitting on sands are in stark contrast to the all-marble airport (of Jeddah) with all its modern amenities.¹⁹

At the immigration desk, the Arab personnel assigned at the counter keenly inspect if the visa stamped in the passport is valid or not. Any infraction automatically leads to interrogation inside a special immigration authorities's room. At the custom area, luggage is thoroughly inspected to prevent the smuggling of items, such as Bibles, crucifixes, rosaries, pornographic magazines and videotapes (which are reviewed in fast-forward mode) and prohibited drugs, including marijuana. Anything they find suspicious or alien is immediately confiscated and thrown into a big plastic garbage bag.

After passing through immigration and customs, one immediately notices the cleanliness and quietness of the airport, a stark contrast to the Manila International Airport, some sixteen hours air travel away. The next thing one encounters are the fifteen stalls lined up near the exit doors. Here, all sorts of consumer goods not prohibited under Islamic laws are displayed – cameras of the latest model, all sorts of imported chocolates, glittering jewelry, fancy clothing and various stereo equipments. The promise of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia beckons.

The airports of Saudi Arabia teem with Filipino contract workers. Along with the 2,000 Arabs who work for Saudi Airlines (Saudia), the kingdom's flag carrier, contract workers, most of whom are Filipinos, operate and maintain the airports, keeping the marble floors and surroundings immaculate. The presence of Filipinos and other contract workers have become a common feature of the Saudi way-of-life.

A contact met the researchers at the airport, driving a second-hand, six-cylinder American car, which served as their main transportation throughout their stay in Jeddah. Most of the time they were in Jeddah, they stayed at the contact's home, a modest two-bedroom flat within the city.

The airports of Jeddah and Riyadh are at least a one-hour's drive away from the city of Jeddah. A Filipino contract worker who wrote a fiction story out of his Saudi stint described the journey from the King Abdul Aziz International Airport to the city of Jeddah:

The heat from the dry and humid surroundings pierces the skin.
It is fortunate that a gentle breeze is always present, a gentle

¹⁹The airport of Jeddah and Riyadh are almost identical in modern facilities, cleanliness and design. The Dammam airport is more comparable to the Philippine domestic airport.

breeze that sucks the residue of their perspiration so they don't feel sticky in spite of the heat. The road is wide, the asphalt is beautiful; there are no trees, no electric posts, no clouds, no life in the vast desert that looks like a dried up sea minus marine life. This emptiness at once strikes at the heart of the newly arrived and, much as they resist it, loneliness creeps in. But they slowly regain strength of will when they pass by several houses and when the roads they pass through start having islands. It is because the islands have plants in them, fresh oleanders and Madagascar periwinkle. They are further rejuvenated when the space between the houses become narrow and they can take a glimpse of the shapes of high-rise buildings in the near distance.²⁹

Traffic and the streets of Jeddah

Traffic in Jeddah is just like Manila's traffic during rush hours, except for the numerous cloverleaves and the abundance of new limousines, Mercedes Benzes, Toyotas and Mazdas. The Saudis are fast drivers like the Filipinos. The right of way is not always observed while traffic lights and through-stop corners are often ignored. Many cars, even the newest ones, have dents and scratches. According to the key informants, these unsightly marks on the cars are considered status symbols in the kingdom.

The major cities of Saudi Arabia, notably Jeddah, Riyadh and the Dammam-Al-Khobar-Dharan areas, are as commercialized as any other major city in the world. Billboards and neon lights abound. Signs are written in Arabic or *bulate* and *espada* as the Filipino workers there would say. Saudi compensates for its lack of natural decorations such as trees, by lighting the whole city at night. The roads are lined with big incandescent lamps about every ten meters so the streets are literally flooded with light. Neon signs announcing top-of-the-line Japanese goods like Nissan cars and Toshiba electronics add color to the otherwise dreary night life. In some opulent sections of the cities, street pavements are painted green or covered with green carpets to simulate bermuda grass. Some mansions have wall fences made of imported marble and sidewalks "planted" with green carpets.

Shopping malls

Shopping complexes are modeled after the *American Safeway* chain of stores. Almost any day after office hours, cars fill the parking lot and

²⁹Ramon V. Lim, *Mga Limbas sa Lupa ni Muhammad* (Manila: Civics and Culture Publishing, 1985), p. 71. (Author's translation from the original Filipino text.)

shoppers crowd the stores. Arabs predominate but one sees pockets of Filipinos, Thais²¹ and Pakistanis. Most of the Filipinos are just window-shopping, a popular pastime, since there are few other places to visit. Aside from the shopping complex (Filipino contract workers call this their Rustan's Department Store), each city has the traditional marketplace called *sug* where prices are generally lower. It is in the *sug* where the famed jewelry stores are located. Each store has a small front window display with an array of jewelry, from diamond rings to 24 carat Saudi gold chains, made more dazzling by spotlights. Unlike jewelry stores elsewhere, these stores have no guards and are usually attended by only one or two storekeepers. A number of thefts by migrant workers of various nationalities have been reported in the newspapers, together with describing the punishment for the offense – cutting off the thief's fingers.

Recreation

Aside from going to the *sug* and shopping complex and daydreaming about what they will buy come pay day (usually the 20th day of the Gregorian month), Filipinos have limited ways to spend their free time. There are no movie houses or beer gardens in Saudi. The beer that is sold has a bitter taste but contains no alcohol. As for television, there are only two stations,²² showing programs mostly in Arabic, except for the nine o'clock evening news, occasional reruns of American series like *CHiPs* and *Sesame Street*, dubbed in Arabic. The best substitute for movies are rented videotapes. It is a flourishing business although choices are limited to films without nude scenes and displays of the crucifix. One can rent a box of twelve tapes for two weeks at a cost of twenty Saudi riyals (about US\$6).

Newspapers

There are several daily newspapers in Arabic but only two English dailies, the *Saudi Gazette* and the *Arab News*. A third newspaper, the Cyprus-published *The Middle East Time* is not always available. Total

²¹The Thais have since left, after diplomatic ties between Thailand and Saudi Arabia were severed following the killing of a Saudi diplomat in Bangkok sometime in 1990.

²²Satellite disks have been introduced during the Gulf War (August 1990) in the country but are still strictly controlled by the government.

circulation of all these papers is around 155,000.²³ The two English newspapers make it a point to include daily news from the Philippines. Occasionally, they also feature articles of specific interest to contract workers, like those about remittance rule and government insurance rules. There is also an editorial page where views on Philippine politics are printed. One of the key informants described the letters to the editors thus:

Kung mababasa mo lang ang mga sagutan dito (Filipinos writing to the editor in the Arab News), matatawa ka. Mayroong "resign" (Marcos), may "wala namang papalit," may mga BMA (Bangsa Moro Army) at MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front), may gigil na gigil kay Koymax (Marcos) at lahat ng gastos ng asawa niya isinulat, may sumasagot na bakit daw dito siya sa Saudi nagmamatapang, gayong sa Pinas (Philippines) takot, mayroon namang umaangal sa mga contractor dito sa Saudi, may mga Pinoy naman (na nagsasabi) na dapat pa nga raw kaming magpasalamat at wala raw kaming karapatang umangal dahil ginusto naming kumita ng dolyar.²⁴

[You would laugh if you could only read the exchanges here. Some say "resign" (Marcos), others say that "no one can take over Marcos' place," there are BMA (Bangsa Moro Army) and MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front), some are fuming mad at Koymax (Marcos) and write about his wife's spending, there are those who ask why he is so courageous to speak in Saudi Arabia whereas he was a coward in the Philippines, there are those who complain against their contractors here in Saudi, there are Filipinos who even say that we should be thankful and that we don't have any right to complain because we chose to earn dollars.]

Some Philippine publications like *People's Journal-Saudi Edition*, *Malaya* and *Mr. & Ms.* are available on a regular, weekly basis.

Clandestine leisure

While alcohol, gambling, prostitution and religious services are prohibited, they are also available, albeit clandestinely and at risk of

²³Lea V. Aquino, Arnel de Guzman and Roli G. Talampas (eds.), *Pinoy Overseas Handbook* (Manila: KAIBIGAN, 1982), p. 11.

²⁴Interview with Mr. Roy Anunciacion, one of the key informants in Riyadh, who was 21 years old at the time and working as draftsman for a construction company in Riyadh. Interview took place on December 10, 1984 at Mr. Anunciacion's flat in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

tremendous consequences. Caucasians, mostly British and Americans working in the diplomatic corps and military establishments, are the common source of smuggled alcoholic beverages such as whiskey and brandy. A bottle of Johnny Walker – Red Label whiskey fetches as much as 500 riyals (US\$150, or more than 12 times its regular price). Pornographic Betamax tapes and posters of nude women are also smuggled in by these Caucasians and some risk-taking Filipinos. Many Filipinos the author met, though, are content with the seductive but still decently clad pictures of such bold stars as Lorna Tolentino, Amy Austria and Alma Moreno which were cut out from magazines like *Liwayway* sent by their relatives or friends back home.

The most common alcoholic drink is a locally brewed spirit called *sadike* (from the Arab word *sadiq* which means friend). Stories by Filipinos point to the Thais as the ones who started the brewing and the bootlegging trade. Soon after, the chemists among the Filipinos (especially those coming from the *lambanog*²⁶-producing towns of Southern Tagalog) surfaced and became experts in the art of brewing and fermenting yeast with any available fruit juice. *Sadike* is sold by the brewer at 70 riyals (US\$21) per liter and is peddled for 120 to 150 riyals (US\$34 to \$45) by enterprising and daring *Pinoy*s out to make a fast buck.

Gambling has also become a common pastime and a means of earning easy money. In fact, in Jeddah alone, three big-time gambling joints are run by Filipino syndicate members. The joints are operated like a casino, complete with guards, drinks, bartenders or tea-boys and assorted card games. Needless to say, these are exclusive places where a new "guest" has to be personally invited and escorted by an old hand.

On a smaller scale, card games (e.g., *Pusoy* or Russian poker, Black Jack and Lucky Nine) are played inside the rooms in the villa. If playing cards are not available, they will bet on anything. For example, they will bet on the name of an approaching commercial airplane, the Jai Alai results in Manila, or picking the highest number (i.e., nine) on a book page (known as "book jack").

Extreme sexual repression in Saudi Arabia has also not stopped prostitution. Women prostitutes are varied and not limited to any nationality. A number are actually professional prostitutes who went to Saudi for legitimate employment as stewardesses, nurses, or domestic helpers. Others became prostitutes only in Saudi either for financial reasons ("to earn more") or as a result of sexual abuse by their Arab employers. In any

²⁶An alcoholic drink from fermented coconut juice.

case, the going rate ranges from 300 riyals (US\$90) for an African prostitute to 2000 riyals (US\$600) for a white Lebanese stewardess.

Catholic mass

At times, Catholic masses are held on Fridays at the U.S., British and Venezuelan embassies, most likely with the consent of the Saudi authorities. To attend mass at the U.S. embassy, however, one must first make an appointment. Mass also serves as a man-woman interaction activity.

Other places of recreation

There are not really many places to see and visit in Saudi. Outside of the shopping mall, there are: the coastal areas of Jeddah (called Corniche and fondly referred to by the *Pinoys* as their Roxas Boulevard) and Dahrán; a few bowling centers – two in Jeddah, two in Riyadh and one in Al-Khobar (entrance fee is 10 riyals (US\$6) per person); and the basketball-cum-volleyball and tennis courts in big companies.

Bangkaan

The next best form of recreation is to talk. *Bangkaan* is the term coined for this session of sharing one's past, swapping jokes, debating and discussing politics, religion, or sex. The topics in the *bangkaan* are varied; they range from the absurd to the profound. One aluminum pipe-fitter puts it this way: *Saan-saan nakakarating ang usapan namin. Minsan hanggang sa buwan.* (The topics of our conversation vary. They go to different directions, including to the moon). These sessions are informal, unstructured and impromptu. They usually start with two roommates sharing their joys, their anxieties, their expectations, their loneliness. Soon others join. When the topics get too "heavy," melodramatic or melancholic, someone will try to change the subject by injecting humor or telling an old green joke. By then, all traumatic experiences are ridiculed or dismissed, at least for the meantime, thus making the discussion seem light.

Working conditions

Daily life, including work time, in Saudi Arabia is punctuated by prayers (*salat*). Muslims are directed by the *Qur'an* to say prayers five

times a day, so the work schedule is structured accordingly. Another determining factor in scheduling work hours is the harsh noontime heat which makes work uncomfortable.

At the crack of dawn (before 5 a.m.) the first prayer (*Fajr*) is said. An announcement through the loudspeaker in the mosque's turret (there are several in a given vicinity), calls on the faithful to practice their daily obligation.

The ensuing prayers are repeated four more times in the day – around noon (*Dhuhr*), in the afternoon (*Assr*), as the sun sets (*Maghreb*) and around seven in the evening (*Isha*). Shops are closed and work is suspended during *salat*. In some areas, there are designated *mutawa* (men with sticks) who literally herd the men inside the mosque to pray.

Typical working hours for most companies and establishments are from eight in the morning to two in the afternoon, with breaks for noon time prayer and coffee at around 10 a.m. Then there is the two-hour lunch break from 2 to 4 p.m., which includes a siesta as it is too hot to work (especially during the summer months from March to September). Work resumes at 4 p.m. and lasts until 8 p.m. with two breaks for prayer and one for coffee. All in all, this is an eight-hour work schedule. For government offices, a straight 7 a.m. to 2 p.m. work schedule is practiced. Hospitals and big clinics provide the standard round-the-clock service in three shifts, (i.e., from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m.; 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.; and 10 p.m. to 6 a.m.). The normal schedule changes during the fasting month of Ramahdan (which usually falls in March or April) when Muslims abstain from eating solid food from sunrise to sunset.

According to Filipino labor officials in Jeddah, Filipino contract workers are almost evenly distributed in the major cities of Jeddah, Riyadh and the Eastern province of Al-Khobar, Dharan and Dammam. Each city accounts for 30 percent of the Filipino population, for a total of 90 percent. The remaining 10 percent live and work in pocket areas in the mountains and desert, like Taif, Hail and Buraida.

Employers of Filipino workers can be classified into five categories: The first are the so-called prime contractors. These are usually multinational corporations based in or affiliated with the United States or Japan, which have secured prime contracts in Saudi business areas for mineral extraction and big infrastructure projects. A foremost example is ARAMCO. This category of employers offers by far the best working conditions and higher wages.

Next in rank are the joint ventures. Typically, these are partnerships by either the government or private companies or even rich Saudi

individuals with big corporations (not necessarily multinational) that engage in various types of business and industry. One example is the joint venture between the Philippine corporation RISCO (Razon International Stevedoring Corporation) and a Saudi partner. This company was engaged in stevedoring services at the port of Jeddah until it lost in a bidding in 1984. Conditions in such companies are still at par with the prime contractors and wages are still fairly competitive.

The third category and the most populated includes the local establishments. Some are big, employing from 300 to more than a thousand people. Others are small, with just four employees. Most of the complaints about delays in salary, contract violations, low wages and unsatisfactory working and living conditions are reported by workers in the local establishments.

The fourth type are the private employers. These are mostly rich families, usually affiliated by blood or strong social ties to the Royal family, that hire domestic helpers like cooks, personal drivers, cleaners and the like. Workers in this category file many complaints particularly the women who often suffer sexual harassments and abuses. The fifth and the last category is the Saudi government itself, the biggest employer of Filipino labor in the kingdom. Thousands of Filipino OCWs work in various government hospitals and ministries of health, communication and defense. Working conditions in government offices are usually good.

In 1984, unskilled Filipino workers in the kingdom got as much as US\$200 to US\$300 monthly wage excluding food allowance of around US\$50. The minimum Philippine wage then stood at around US\$88 per month. In addition, the sponsoring company provided for their accommodation and round-trip airfare to Saudi Arabia. They received 15 days of paid vacation and a round-trip ticket to Manila after completing eleven months of work. Overtime rate was one and a half times per extra hour and double the rate during holidays.

If unskilled Filipino workers earn four or five times what they would be getting in the Philippines, skilled workers and professionals earn much more. An avionics technician working for Philippine Airlines (PAL), for example, received 2,000 a month at most (or roughly US\$100) in 1984. For doing the same job, Saudia Airlines pays him US\$1,000, excluding benefits like free housing and food allowance. This is easily ten times more than he could get in the Philippines. In late 1984, reliable sources inside PAL said that there were about 200-300 "vacancies" for avionics technicians.

Medical and dental facilities are standard provisions in large companies (of the prime contractor, joint venture, government and big local establishment type). Employees have access to free medicine, hospitalization and other benefits. They are covered under the government's insurance system (GOSI or Government Social Insurance)²⁶ as well as the company's own insurance policy (a value of 5,000 to 10,000 pesos), which includes life insurance coverage and coverage against sickness and war risk. The larger companies also provide comfortable living quarters, washing facilities and, sometimes, access to sports facilities like basketball and tennis courts; some, like the Saudi American Bec'htel, even have gymnasiums. The real big ones like the Saudia subdivision and the Aramco complex have swimming pools, squash and pelota courts and clubhouses with billiards and darts. The RISCO compound has tennis and basketball courts, a recreation hall with a wide Betamax screen, billiard tables, auditorium, table tennis and a ten-seat barber shop that charges 10 riyals (US\$3) per hair cut.

Living conditions

Living conditions of migrant workers in Saudi Arabia are a far cry from the squalid conditions of Irish immigrants described by Engels in *Condition of the Working-Class in England*.²⁷ None of the filthiness exists as Saudi Arabia is generally a clean and "new" country. The area is so vast and population density is still low enough that there is plenty of space for housing. The desert heat which could make life unbearable has been neutralized by the air conditioner. It seems that every habitable place in Saudi Arabia has been air-conditioned. Even workers's quarters, whether in big villas or the mezzanine of a run-down building, are air-conditioned. Outside of this "cold" fact, facilities are appropriate to the size and type of company.

Nevertheless, conditions are not always good. In almost all of the smaller companies the researchers visited, recreational facilities are sorely lacking. In fact, in front of the villa of the male nurses of Erfan Hospital in Jeddah, the men erected their own small makeshift basketball ring (typical in many small street corners and *eskinitas* in Manila). In another villa (Arabian Homes), the workers dragged a battered billiard table from a garbage pile, renovated it with tape, plaster

²⁶The GOSI was stopped in 1990.

²⁷Frederick Engels, *The Condition of the Working-Class in England* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980).

and glue and installed it in the villa lobby. The torn pockets of the billiard table were replaced with paint cans to catch incoming balls, which produce a lot of noise every time a ball drops.

The worst conditions can be found at the desert jobsite. Here, air conditioners are non-existent as there is no electricity yet in the unfinished buildings. In some areas, temperature rises to 50 degrees Centigrade in summer. Water is scarce and must be rationed. Food is limited and often consists entirely of poultry for months: chicken for lunch, chicken for dinner and chicken eggs for breakfast. Because campsites are often isolated in the desert, workers frequently encounter delays in payment, remittance problems and contract violations. They have little or no hope at all for legal redress when abuses by the employer or manager occur.

Recreation, which is already limited, is even less available in the desert. One worker who had spent some two years at a construction site in the middle of the desert said that whenever he felt lonely and homesick, he climbed the hilly area of the desert, counted the camels he could see and took pictures of himself and the things around him. Natural hazards are also present in the jobsite, like scorpions, snakes, desert flies and sandstorms.

Government services

Besides the staff of the Philippine Embassy, there are three labor attaches and two POEA representatives to serve the needs of more than 200,000 Filipino employees in the kingdom.²⁸ Everyday, according to one of the labor attaches, they receive between 50 to 200 calls asking for help with labor problems ranging from non-payment of wages to maltreatment to illegal termination. Some three to four rape cases are reported to the Labor Center per year. In addition, they are expected by the government "to coordinate all labor training, employment and workers's welfare functions and operations, promote Filipino workers and expertise (... and) maximize foreign exchange generation."²⁹

This small office in Jeddah with the big title of Philippine Regional Labor Center for the Middle East and Africa is clearly unable to provide assistance where it is needed. Besides, the staff are called in only for

²⁸Welfare centers have been established in Riyadh and Jeddah.

²⁹From the author's interview with Ambassador Jonathan de la Cruz, Director of the Regional Labor Center for the Middle East and Africa in his office in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, December 8, 1984.

minor arbitration. One of the labor attaches confirmed this, saying: *Kumpara ang situasyon dito na kung saan walang renegotasyon ng kontrata sa situasyon sa Pilipinas, hindi natin kontrolado ang situasyon dito.* (Comparing the situation here, where renegotiation does not exist, with the situation in the Philippines, we do not control the situation here).

Many Filipino contract workers, according to all the key informants, are angered by the inefficiency and indifference of the Labor Center and the Philippine Embassy (which they perceive as a single government body). To them, these institutions are good only for taking their money (through taxation, exorbitant fees for passport renewal and the forced remittance scheme). "*Magaling lang ang Embassy sa pagkuha ng pera namin,*" they often complain.

The workers in their environment

The world of most Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia revolves around their work, as that is their main reason for migrating. It is therefore not uncommon to find workers who spend even their leisure time working, stopping only for meals, prayer time and eight or less hours of sleep. They keep this schedule not only to earn more but to distract themselves from homesickness.

Para malibang ang isipan namin at hindi kami laging nag-iisip at nag-aalala sa aming mga pamilya, dinadaan na lang namin sa panay "overtime." Kumikita pa. (We just resort to working overtime in order not to worry about our family. We also earn more this way).

Such sentiments are shared by the interviewees, key informants and participants in the focused group discussion, regardless of place of work, job category, sex, age and other variables. Likewise, others moonlight to earn more and escape boredom. In Jeddah, for instance, the author saw Filipinos selling bus tickets in the *suq* to augment their income. Others sell postage stamps within their villas. A Filipino construction worker earned more than his regular salary by washing and ironing his co-workers's clothes. Such sideline work is especially common among unskilled workers who paid high placement fees.

Income and benefits

David Lockwood, in his study on class consciousness of the clerical workers in Britain, described the "market situation" as the source and size of income, degree of job security and opportunity for upward

occupational mobility.³⁰ Lockwood asserts that such variables or factors define the "class position" of the workers and determine their consciousness.

W. Wesolowski also notes the significance of income in the determination of class consciousness. He said, "The relationship to the means of production forms class consciousness by determining level of income and status in the social organization of work. The amount of income acts upon class consciousness in terms of the possibilities it represents and in terms of social prestige."³¹

Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia are paid monthly, as were our forty interviewees.

From among the interviewees, a skilled construction worker receives the lowest monthly income of US\$250. This figure does not include overtime pay, the US\$100 monthly food allowance and the lodging expenses paid by the company. The highest paid among the respondents is a junior bank executive who handles the credit facilities of the Saudi-French Bank in downtown Riyadh. He receives US\$2,000 a month, with a car and a studio-type condominium. The mean income of the forty respondents is US\$595.50.

It was also noted that 97.5 percent of the workers were paid within their first month of work. Only 2.5 percent received their salary after three months of work (although this is not uncommon in the kingdom).

The amounts they actually remit to their families back home are actually much higher because the salaries listed above are just their basic income. All the interviewees do overtime work, if available.

While almost all workers receive a food allowance and decent housing, amenities vary proportionally with the income. Construction workers, including their service "attachments" like the cooks and the waiters, are quartered no less than four to a room. Professionals like nurses, engineers and highly skilled technicians have their own studios. Two respondents work for Saudia Airlines, earning more than US\$800 a month and enjoying the privilege of bringing their families to live with them. Those two also receive fifteen days of paid vacation every six months (compared to the standard fifteen days of paid vacation every 11 months). They are encouraged to own cars through a payment plan.

³⁰David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness* (London: Unwin University Book, 1969).

³¹W. Wesolowski, "The Notions of Strata and Class in Socialist Society," in *Social Inequality*, Andre Beteille (ed.), (England: Penguin Books, 1974), p. 124.

There are also discrepancies in pay based on nationality (Saudi nationals get the most, followed by Caucasians and non-Saudi Arabs, with Third World nationals receiving the lowest salaries). Such discrimination has a huge impact on the workers who must, nonetheless, tolerate the offense. The avionics technician interviewee from Saudia Airlines rationalizes it this way:

Hindi naman sa pagmamayabang, pero mas alam namin ang aming trabaho kaysa sa mga Arabo o kahit sa mga Puti. Pero mas mababa ang sahod namin. Dito kakainin mo talaga ang pride mo. Di ka maka-angal. Pag nagsalita na sila (Arabo), wala ka nang magawa, nasa bansa ka nila. Kung hindi lamang sa dolyar, ewan ko kung may gusto pang magtrabaho rito.

[I am not being boastful, but we (Filipinos) know more about our jobs compared with the Arabs or even the Whites. But our pay is less. Here you will really eat your pride. You can't say a thing. When they (Arabs) speak, you can't do anything about it, you're in their country. If it were not for the dollars, I don't know if anyone would want to work here.]

Still, most interviewees agree they could not earn as much in the Philippines. *Sa Pilipinas, hindi namin kikitain ang ganitong kalaking suweldo*, is a common observation. If one compares their last salary in the Philippines with their present salary, one sees that indeed there is a substantial and significant difference. It is worth noting that they perceive their income in terms of its buying power in the Philippines – according to the “times twenty” mentality (or whatever the current exchange rate is between the peso and the US dollar). Their dollar earnings are further enhanced by the relatively cheap commodities in Saudi Arabia. One female nurse aptly noted that: *Isang suwelduhan mo lang, makahabili ka na ng mga kailangan mo*. (With just one salary, you can buy the things that you need).

Since there is virtually no room for extravagant leisure unless one resorts to big-time gambling, high-priced prostitutes and frivolous shopping sprees, one does not spend much in the jobsite or even in the villa. One maintenance worker who has been in Saudi since 1979 with only some months off, has already saved P100,000. The banker receiving the highest salary just had a house built in Parañaque.

All the respondents confirmed that they have sick and vacation leave benefits. The sick leave is not convertible to cash when unused although the vacation leave is. As for government insurance (GOSI) which is a

mandatory benefit, 80 percent are covered by it, five percent are not while the remaining 15 percent answered that they "do not know."

These benefits are further compensation for the personal and social difficulties the worker must face. "*Pag naho-homesick kami, iniisip na lang namin ang dollar na mawawala. Kaya pag-suweldo na, wala na ang homesick.*" (If we are homesick, we just think of the dollars that will be lost. Come payday, our homesickness disappears). This reality is also reflected in the art work, songs and poems that the workers create to express their feelings. A popular sign among Pinoy contract workers is the "homesick versus dollar" sign silkscreened on their t-shirts. This line from a poem by a contract worker published in *Pinoy Overseas Chronicle* sums up the conflict between earning more money and the stress of working abroad:

*Dito sa Gitnang Silangan aking naranasan,
Lahat ng hirap ng aking kalooban,
Mahal sa buhay laging nasa isipan,
Lungkot ng buhay ay hindi napaparam.
Iniisip tuwina ang kasayahan,
Pasyal dito, pasyal doon, aking naranasan
TV, stereo, at beta binili nang tuluyan
Upang malunasan, kalungkutan sa buhay.³²*

[Here in the Middle East I experienced
all kinds of heartaches
Loved ones always in my mind
Sadness in life is never ending
I am always thinking of happiness
Sightseeing here, sightseeing there, I experienced
TV, stereo and betamax I all bought
To relieve my loneliness in life.]

Job security

While incomes are relatively higher, the job security of the contract workers is quite unstable. In fact, only three out of the total 40 interviewees think they are secure in their current occupation. The first one is an employee of Cathay Pacific Airways who was trained by the company to assume the ticket counter post in Jeddah. The second

³²Daniel V. Constantino, "Gitnang Silangan," *Pinoy Overseas Chronicle*, May 1986, p. 24.

respondent is the banker who has worked in that bank for three years. The third is a nurse employed at the King Fahd Hospital in Riyadh.

Of the 93 percent who said that there is no job security in their current work or in the Saudi Arabian market in general, two belong to a Filipino joint-venture company (RISCO) facing closure because it lost a bid to renew its stevedoring services contract. Another two respondents ran away from their establishment and were trying to get their papers so they could return home. They complained about the absence of a written renewal contract when their first contract expired after two years. A similar complaint was registered by two other people from two different companies. As they put it, "The second contract which is supposed to be the renewal contract is purely verbal." Still, two more interviewees (from Saudia Airlines) complained of being renewed only on a monthly basis after their two-year contract had lapsed: "*Malakas ang insecurity dahil buwanan ang pirma.*"

The same interviewees who are working as avionics technicians at Saudia Airlines considered the policy of Saudinization as a constant threat to any contract worker in Saudi Arabia. Saudinization is a strict policy by the Saudi government to replace foreign workers with Saudi workers after the latter have been properly trained. It is provided for in the Labor and Workers Law which states in Article 50 the following:

In accordance with the conditions, rules and periods to be determined by the Minister of Labor, every employer shall vocationally prepare his Saudi workers to replace non-Saudis, by improving their standards in technical jobs performed by non-Saudis so that the Saudi worker may be able to replace the non-Saudi. The employer shall keep a register in which he shall record the names of the Saudi workers who have replaced non-Saudis."³³ (Underscoring supplied.)

Again, the contract workers tolerate discrimination because, in the words of an auto mechanic we interviewed, "*Hindi habang panahon narito kami.*" (We will not be here all our life). Perhaps the realization that they are in Saudi temporarily drives them to maximize the economic gains they can get and tolerate the low degree of job security. They figure that since they entered a contract clearly defining the tenure of their services and the corresponding remuneration, a renewal of contract would then be considered as a bonus.

³³"The Labor and Workmen Law from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," *Pinoy Overseas Chronicle*, July 1985, p. 18.

Upward mobility

Chances for upward mobility within the Saudi framework are minimal. However, compared to the factor of job security, there are slightly more interviewees (seven out of 40 or 17.5 percent) who think they have a chance for upward mobility. While none of those interviewed have actually been promoted (though a few of the professionals got incremental salary increases), seven respondents think positively about the possibility of being promoted. Of the seven, four are women nurses. Of the remaining three males, one works as a hotel counter clerk, another as an airline counter clerk and the third is the banker who receives US\$2,000 monthly. All seven work for companies who have long-term relations in the kingdom (i.e., hospitals, hotel, airline and bank). Perhaps they really can move up but, definitely, only to a certain level because the top positions are reserved for Saudis or are currently occupied by Caucasians.

The rest of the interviewees, especially the production workers, were hired and imported to do specific short-term work like building a house, cooking food, driving 16-wheeler cargo trucks and the like. Because the demand for them was so specific, they will move only within the confines of that specific job description, if at all.

It is worthwhile to note that in a government survey of 619 returned land-based workers from all over the world, 497 or 80.3 percent said they did not receive any overseas employment promotion. The remaining 122 or 19.7 percent said they were promoted.³⁴

The "work situation"

Lockwood speaks of a second factor which defines the "class position" of workers in a given situation. He calls it the "work situation" or "the set of social relationships in which the individual is involved at work by virtue of his/her position in the division of labor."³⁵

The theory draws from Marx's famous dictum on the determination of consciousness by the existing relations of production:

³⁴Institute of Labor and Manpower Studies (ILMS), *Working Abroad: The Socio-Economic Consequences of Contract Labor Migration in the Philippines* (Manila: ILMS, Ministry of Labor and Employment, 1984), p. 190.

³⁵Lockwood, *loc. cit.*

In the social production which men carry on they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will; these relations of production correspond to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society -- the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructure arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond. The mode of production of material life determines the general character of the social, political and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary; their social being determines their consciousness.³⁶

Engels argued that it is the division of labor that determines class divisions. He contended that the dichotomy of society between an "exploiting" and an "exploited class," "a ruling and an oppressed class," was the "necessary outcome of the low development of production hitherto."³⁷ Neo-Marxists added that while the basic determinant of class is still the relationship to the means of production, or ownership or non-ownership of it, the control or lack of control over the means of production is also an important factor.³⁸

Regarding the workers used in this study, absolutely none were owners of the means of production or had any control over their work methods or the final product of their labor. This is even true for the two interviewees holding administrative posts (operations manager and foreman). The operations manager receives direct orders from his boss who is the owner of the company, while the foreman is more of a team leader who relays orders from the supervisor, but does not formulate them himself.

The forty interviewees come from 27 companies. Of these companies, 59.26 percent are local establishments. Joint venture companies account for 22.22 percent. The government as an employer accounts for 14.82 percent of the total. Only one company (Marriot Hotel) is a prime contractor (3.7 percent).

³⁶Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1978), pp. 20-21.

³⁷Frederick Engels, *Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science (Anti-Dühring)* (New York: International Publishers, 1979), p.307.

³⁸Stephen Castles and Godula Kosack, "Immigrant Workers and Class Structure," in *An Introduction to Sociology*, Robert Bockock, et.al. (eds.), (Glasgow: The Open University Press, 1983), p. 396.

Around 7,366 Filipinos work in these 27 companies representing 2.5 percent of the total Filipino labor population in the kingdom at the time of the study. The mean average is 273 workers but the variation is quite large as some companies employ more than a thousand. Saudi Airlines, for example, employs around 2,000 Filipinos, the same number employed in the government's desalination plant (RSAL Co.) in Dammam. There are also small local establishments which employ one or two Filipino workers.

In the case of the prime contractor, joint venture and government type of companies, the typical capitalist division of labor applies. There are owners and stock-holders who do not take part in the production process but rather employ a team of managers (mostly Caucasians) to operate the business. At the base of the structure are the workers. For the local establishment, the structure is much simpler. Usually the Saudi owner is very visible as he directs the operation by himself. Some large establishments, though, make use of limited middle management to help in the business operation.

Whatever the structure and the ensuing relations, the workers interviewed do not seem to mind the 'work situation' as long as wages are not delayed. Their complaints concern the human relations or the way they are treated. "*Mabagsik ang amo ko*" (My boss is harsh) and "*Wala namang alam ang 'bisor' namin*" (Our supervisor does not know anything) are common complaints. Unfortunately, the interviewees are unable to relate such maltreatments and discriminations to the concept of structural exploitation.

Except for the heat which can be very unpleasant, the respondents find their work light. It is not so much a matter of modern technology, although those who need it, like Saudia Airlines, RSAL and the government hospitals have it. Construction work is mostly manual with some mechanization like bulldozers and cranes. More likely, it is because the work pace is characteristically slow. In the hospitals, for example, work is often done at a leisurely pace since there are few patients.

Besides the negative treatment and cultural restrictions, the workers also complained about the harsh, if not inhuman, provisions in the Saudi Labor Code regarding workers's protest actions to redress grievances. Article 189, Chapter XII on penalties of the Labor and Workman Law of Saudi Arabia states that:

- 1) Any person who conspires with a group of persons for the purpose of stopping:

- a) Means of transportation between parts of the kingdom and between other countries;
 - b) Postal, telegraph and telephone communications;
 - c) Any of the public utilities, especially those concerned with distribution of water, electricity and principal foodstuff; shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of one month or a fine of SR1,000 to SR3,000 or both.
- 2) The same penalty shall apply to the concessionaire of any of the said utilities, if he stops its operation without legitimate cause.
 - 3) Where the crime is accompanied by acts of violence against persons or property or by threats or other means of intimidation or by forms of deceit or false pretense that are apt to influence the mind, or by gathering on public roads and in public squares, or by occupying the place of work, the offenders shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of six months to two years or a fine of SR1,000 to SR5,000 or both.

Article 190 of the same law states that: "Any person who, using any of the means mentioned in the last paragraph of the previous article (189 that is), causes or attempts to cause others to stop their work agreement among themselves or encourages or attempts to encourage to stop such work, shall be punished with imprisonment for a term of one to five years or a fine of SR5,000 to SR10,000 or both."³⁹

In effect this law reinforces the worker's sense of helplessness. "*Wala namang mangyayari kung aangal,*" the workers tell us when we ask whether they attempted to improve their situation.

Despite the low job security, limited chances for upward mobility and unfavorable working environment, the workers accept things matter of factly, because their income in Saudi is still relatively much higher than what they used to earn in the Philippines. This reinforces Keyser's observation about contract workers in general. He said, "The (contract) worker is mainly concerned with obtaining a high salary, save money and return home as fast as possible"⁴⁰ (Insertion supplied.)

The dominant value then that determines the entire response system of the workers to the "market and work situations" is the pursuit of money through overseas employment. The dollars compensate for

³⁹"The Labor and Workmen Law from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia," *Pinoy Overseas Chronicle*, February 1986, p. 17.

⁴⁰Labor Relations Division, Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE), *Insights into Temporary Labor Migration: The Case of Filipino Workers in Iran*, mimeographed paper, 1980, p. 4.

almost any negative condition. The workers's typical reaction to even the most flagrant violations by employers, is one of acceptance or tolerance. Some would call it the path of least resistance.

The workers' view of themselves

According to Professor Randolph S. David, Filipinos are not generally known to be a contemplative people.⁴¹ They take the passing of each day as an act of the gods over which mortals have no control. But given a situation of extreme isolation, Filipinos are forced to examine their environment, their fellow humans and, more importantly, themselves. In their loneliness, they must confront their motivations for working abroad.

Aspirations

The many studies of international migration have all concluded that workers seek employment abroad for mainly economic reasons. The Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia are no exception.

A survey of workers of Dumez (a big French construction company with several projects in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere in the Middle East) reveals that the foremost reason for seeking employment abroad is to be able to send the children to school (30.6 percent). A close second (26.5 percent) is to fulfill their aspiration to buy a house and lot.⁴²

The survey conducted by three U.P. sociologists produced more extensive findings as to why overseas contract workers chose to work abroad.⁴³ Still, these revolve around the issue of getting more to have more. On the same issue, the government's findings also cited economic factors although their question was formulated in terms of target savings from overseas work.⁴⁴

⁴¹Interview with Prof. Randolph S. David, July 7, 1986, Third World Studies Center, U.P. Diliman, Quezon City.

⁴²Lydia J. Hechanova, *A Dumez Survey on the Needs of Dumez Filipino Overseas Workers*, unpublished research paper, Manila, 1982, p. 10.

⁴³A study of Arcinas, Banzon-Bautista and David cites not having enough income as a principal reason for working abroad. Related to this is the desire to accumulate savings (second most cited reason for working abroad). The third reason for working abroad is the absence of work in the country.

⁴⁴The study of the Institute of Labor and Manpower Studies (1984) reveals that 37.2 percent want to start a business, 36 percent would like to buy a house and lot, 20.65 percent are saving for the education of their children, and 15.8 percent are planning for the security of the family.

The reasons mentioned above can be compared with the responses of the 40 interviewees in this study, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Distribution of Interviewees by Reasons for Working Abroad (in Percent)

<u>Reasons for Working Percentage</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
For children's future (education)	14	32.57
To be able to save	9	20.93
Low salary in the Philippines	5	11.63
Buy house and lot	3	6.97
For family's sustenance	3	6.97
Start a business	3	6.97
Prepare for the future	1	2.33
Others	5	11.63
a) Adventure (2.33 percent)		
b) Just by chance (4.65 percent)		
c) Fad (2.33 percent)		
d) Helpless in the Phils. (2.33 percent)		
Total	43*	100.00

*more than one response per respondent.

All OCWs desire a more comfortable future, although they defined this differently: "*para sa kinabukasan ng mga bata*" (for the future of the children) and "*mahabili ng bahay at lupa*" (to be able to buy house and lot) to general statements like "*para maka-ipon*" (to be able to save). Whereas before, all they had were dreams – education for the children, television, Betamax, jewelry, house and lot – their stint in Saudi Arabia gives them a chance (no matter how slim) to make these dreams come true.

Naturally, the workers also enjoy a corresponding increase in social status or what Lockwood defines as "the position of the individual in the hierarchy of prestige in the society at large."⁴⁵ The workers themselves realize and admit this. "Our experience here in Saudi has changed us.

⁴⁵David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness* (London: Unwin University Book, 1969), p. 15.

Nagbago na raw kami, sabi ng aming mga kaibigan. (We have changed, our friends tell us.) It is difficult to explain to them if they have not undergone the hardships here."

The change is not towards being boastful (*mayabang*), or in colloquial terms, *wala nang kilala* (being a snob). Most of the interviewees denied that. It is more a change in their perception of things. As one interviewee said, *Dito, magiging mas responsable ka.* (Here you will become more responsible). Almost all (95 percent) interviewees say their horizon was broadened by their stint in Saudi Arabia. Almost the same number think they are better off than their counterparts in the Philippines.

In terms of changes in lifestyle, 82.5 percent said there have been changes in their lifestyle. The remaining 17.5 percent said there is none. Those who noted changes in lifestyle ascribed this to their increased purchasing power. "With our earnings here, we can now buy the things we have always wanted to buy." Usually, they start with personal items like clothes and jewelry. Then they buy household items like kitchenware, appliances, televisions and Betamax machines. One of the respondents who went home for his yearly vacation even bought some Persian rugs for his house. Those who have completed the shopping list for the house (29 out of 40 or 72.5 percent already did), move up to more expensive goals, like buying a house and lot, or a jeepney or tricycle for business. The respondents from Saudia Airlines sounding a bit defensive, put it this way: "*Dati matugunan lang ang kailangan, ayos na. Ngayon, tumataas na ang ambisyon.*" (Before, we were just after meeting our basic needs. Now our ambition gets higher). For one worker, though, the gauge as to whether there or not there has been a change in his/her lifestyle is a simple one – it is in the alcoholic drink he takes. He quips, "Before going here, I was contented with beer. Now, it has to be hard drinks (whisky or brandy)."

With limited outlets for leisure and cultural development, the workers are drawn into the mentality of blatant materialism. Perhaps, for the first time in their lives, they are able to buy "luxurious" commodities. They suddenly find themselves surrounded by all sorts of imported goods which they can actually afford to buy. The workers react accordingly: "*Nakaka-inganyo*" (enticing), "I am tempted to buy." "For me, the goods on display are a source of inspiration to work harder," were some of the answers given.⁴⁶

⁴⁶Cf. Elena L. Samonte, "The Psychosocial Costs of Post-Employment of Overseas Workers: A Research Agenda" in *Philippine Journal of Public Administration*, Volume XXXVI, Number 3, July 1992, for discussion on social costs of overseas work. Here, Samonte uses Homan's Equity Theory to support her thesis.

An aluminum pipe-fitter named certain Jun Maramba showed his collection of camera and video equipment. He is already in his fifth year of work in Saudi and has already bought his family basic household appliances, such as a refrigerator, gas stove, stereo component, Betamax machine and others. He now concentrates on completing his new hobby, still and video photography. His somewhat small room holds boxes of the latest gadgets in photography, such as a mini hand-held video camera, electronic flash, tripod, zoom lenses for his Nikon camera and other accessories.

A number of those interviewed who have completed more than two years of contract are on their way to saving for their dream house and lot. All of them said that they will return to the Philippines once the construction of these houses are completed.

One computer analyst working in ARAMCO noted the social prestige of buying and displaying many consumer goods. He claims the 'display' enables him to alleviate his homesickness.

The workers's political views

The Marcos era was a time for suppressing dissent. Even Filipinos in far-flung Saudi Arabia were intimidated into silence. At first, the people interviewed would not answer such sensitive questions as "What do you think of the Marcos government?"

It would, however, be unrealistic to think that political issues are not included in the *bangkaan* of the workers. Inevitably, as much as they would like to evade the topic, Philippine politics elicit concern and interest. The assassination of Senator Benigno Aquino, Jr., for instance, was covered by the Saudi newspapers and described in personal letters from home.

In fact, whenever the researcher was introduced as having just arrived from Manila, the first question they asked was: "*Kumusta na sa atin? Ano na ang nangyayari?*" (How is the situation in our country? What are the developments?). Such questions undoubtedly refer to the political situation. Even the queries on the economic crisis inevitably lead to its connection with politics.

A group of aluminum fitters encountered in the focused group discussions tried to evade questions related to Philippine politics by saying that they had grown tired of it (*sinawaan na*). Still another group, in another group discussion, deflected the question with a witty answer:

"Dito, hindi na si Marcos ang pinag-uusapan, si Reagan na." (Here, Marcos is no longer our topic, but Reagan).

Though far from the Marcos regime, many workers would not readily give their political opinions. The workers's sense of caution can also be explained by the fact that a number of workers said they were compelled to work in Saudi because not everything is going well in the Philippines ("kaya nga kami napipilitang magtrabaho sa Saudi dahil hindi maganda ang lagay sa atin").

In contrast, a batch of Filipinos waiting in a shuttle bus returning to the campsite responded to our questions about Philippine politics by flashing an "L" sign, for *Laban* (Fight) and posed to be photographed. They also said that Marcos should know that they all oppose his rule.

Twenty years of Marcos rule has indeed polarized the Filipino people. Quite a number would like to keep their views to themselves. A few openly showed support for Marcos. Many more expressed their dislike for the Marcos government.

Our survey revealed that 95 percent of the respondents discussed politics while only two respondents said they don't talk about politics. The respondents cited the worsening economic crisis as a major topic. They also complained about corruption in the government, the huge national debt, assassinations like those of Aquino and Climaco and other current events.

Similar to the findings of the U.P. Sociology survey, the respondents also complained about the indifference of some embassy workers to their plight, the forced remittance of 50 to 70 percent of their basic earnings and the high fees charged for passport renewal.⁴⁷

Take the case of Mr. Reyes, an electrical engineer from Tayabas, Quezon, who dislikes the compulsory remittance, which is enforced at RSAL Company, a water-cooling plant where he works. Said Mr. Reyes:

It is very impractical. What, let say, you're a bachelor. Imagine, sending 50 percent of your basic salary. What if they mismanage your money? Or even if you're married. Still, you have to spend here. What if there is an emergency?

Of the 40 workers interviewed 85 percent oppose the Marcos government. Ten percent say it is fine, with two out of the four adding that "the Marcos government is just alright as long as our salaries come

⁴⁷Prof. Fe R. Arcinas, Dr. Ma. Rose Cynthia Banzon-Bautista and Prof. Randolph S. David, *The Odyssey of Migrant Workers to the Gulf Region* (Quezon City: Department of Sociology, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines, January 1986), p. 148.

regularly and on time.” The remaining five percent had no comment. For those who opposed the Marcos government, a number cited the mismanagement of the country as the main reasons but were particularly opposed to forced remittance through government-authorized banking channels. “*Bakit nila pakiki-alaman ang pera namin at bakit kami ang paparusahan?*” (Why should they meddle with our money and why should we be the ones to be punished?), they would ask. A great majority (82.5 percent) oppose Executive Order 857 or the forced remittance rule per se. All were against the specific provision that their passports be canceled and they be blacklisted if they violate the forced remittance rule.

Questions of faith

Religion represents a powerful institution. Max Weber in fact asserted that aside from the mode of production and the ensuing social relations, it was the “spirit” of Protestantism in the West that pushed the development of capitalism to its limit.⁴⁸

Yet, even in a Muslim country, 85 percent of the workers interviewed said that there was really no change in their faith during their stint in Saudi Arabia. However, six respondents (15 percent) said their religious beliefs underwent dramatic changes. Two of the six “converted” to Islam, while the remaining four said that their faith was strengthened. One worker even compared his stint in Saudi to attendance in the *cursillo*.⁴⁹ “*Maisip mong lahat ang naging takbo ng buhay mo, para kang naghursilyo.*” Another one who said his faith was strengthened joined a fellowship, a Bible reading and prayer meeting that is considered illegal by Saudi authorities and sometimes scorned by fellow workers as just “fellowchicks” or simply an attempt to meet women.

For the two workers who changed religion, from Catholicism to Islam, it was primarily because they knew they could get more benefits as Muslims. They came to this conclusion after having lived in the kingdom for over five years and seen the favorable treatment given by Muslim Arabs to fellow Muslims, regardless of nationality. After all, in the Islamic faith, they are all brothers and sisters in the eyes of Allah.

⁴⁸See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1958).

⁴⁹The *cursillo* is a four nights and three days live-in seminar where traditional Catholic dogmas are taught through a series of lectures (rolyo) by priests and lay leaders. It originated in Spain in the early 1960s.

Discussions concerning religion are also common. Usually the talk concerns the differences between Muslim and Catholic practices. As far as individual worship among the workers, 87.5 percent resort to praying by themselves. For example, the worker who compared his stint in Saudi to the *cursillo* prays the novena regularly inside his room every Wednesday after work. The one who joined the fellowship attends the Bible sharing every Saturday night in a designated villa (which changes every so often to avoid detection by Saudi authorities). Saturday night is the last night of their regular two days off. By prior arrangement, the prayer meeting is held in a member's house to accommodate five to 15 people), usually after dinner. The leader/organizer welcomes everybody and leads the opening prayer. Then somebody is asked to read some passages in the Bible (smuggled somehow, as this is a banned item). Personal sharing and reflection on the Gospel ensues. Light snacks (on a potluck basis) are served after the prayer session. At times, props like cassette tapes and magazines are readied in case unwanted persons come knocking unexpectedly.

For those who pray, worship is of the informal type except for the two female respondents who pray the rosary occasionally. In all their prayers, the workers are most concerned for the families they left behind in the Philippines. It is for the welfare of their families that the workers take overseas work yet they still feel a sense of helplessness regarding the welfare of their families during their temporary separation.

Holy Mass is a rare event as not many Catholic priests visit Saudi Arabia. If a priest comes at all, his identity is concealed with a business visa issued by a multinational company that acts as his sponsor. The masses, we are told, are held once a month, on a Friday, in the American, British or Venezuelan Embassies in Jeddah. Invitation is spread by word of mouth, but one must make a reservation because spaces are limited. In the American Embassy, mass is usually held in the morning, (while at the British Embassy, it is usually held in the afternoon). The workers come by car in groups of five, at the most. The women attend with other women and seldom travel with male companions aside from their husbands with whom they can present marriage certificates if accosted by the Saudi authorities. After the mass, like the tradition in the Philippines, many of them go to their favorite Filipino restaurants which have already mushroomed in Jeddah.

It is not, however, evident from the discussions with the workers whether or not their faith has imbued them with the drive to accumulate capital as Weber suggested. After all, Weber was talking about

institutionalized religion and the case of the Filipino workers in Saudi Arabia reflects a more individual and personal relation with God. Their religious faith is still basically "traditional" and at best a "therapeutic" device for coping with their existence in Saudi Arabia.

Sexual behavior

A description of the sexual behavior of the workers can give valuable insights as to how people are affected by certain conditions. This study, however, is confined to the sexual behavior of the male workers.

The male contract workers's attitude toward women is one of patriarchal patronage. They think it is inappropriate for women, especially married ones, to work abroad. They presume there must be a marital problem if it is the wife who leaves the country for work. Such thinking assumes that the responsibilities of a woman should be confined to the house: to cook and clean, to bear and raise children.

Nevertheless, women are highly sought after to alleviate "homesexness" (homesickness).

About eleven percent of the male workers who answered questions pertaining to sexual behavior said they go courting (*nanaliligaw*) to land a date with a woman. For them, any woman will suffice. "*Wala nang type-type - basta babae.*" Most of the women they court and date are nurses. Courting usually starts with long telephone conversations (*telebabad*). If the woman agrees to a date, they meet at the shopping mall, usually on the Friday day-off. (One worker calls this the "*araw ng pambababae*" or day for womanizing). The man, upon seeing his date, will walk casually beside her. They converse without looking at each other or holding hands. If the man has no car, the couple just talk, window-shop and eat at the mall's kiosks. Their time limit is two hours or until the shuttle bus that will pick up the woman and her co-workers come honking in the parking lot. A tryst involving more than this requires a marriage license (even if it is fake), because the police often stop workers and ask for identification. A car and a private room are necessary as there are no motels in Saudi and hotels are very expensive and risky.

Close to 78 percent (28 out of 36) of the male workers we interviewed watched smuggled videotapes of *Pinoy* and foreign pornographic Betamax movies, which ironically only aggravate sexual urges.

Since the limited choices of pornographic films becomes boring a number of male workers resort to voyeurism, a challenging activity when all women, whether Saudis or not, must wear an *abaya* (loose black robes) over

their regular clothes when they go out in public. A group of auto mechanics we interviewed said they habitually go to the beach every summer to watch (through binoculars) Lebanese women sunbathing in bikinis. There was also a time, according to our informant (although no respondents experienced this) when Filipinos would stand on top of big buses to peep into the women's pool area of Saudia Airlines, hoping to see some Caucasian employees (usually flight attendants) swimming in bikinis.

When the sexual need gets so intense, a number admitted they resort to masturbation (11.11 percent). Only two male respondents are lucky enough to have their wives with them in Saudi.

Another 11.11 percent said they hire prostitutes whenever they want. It would be interesting to note that these four workers belonged to one villa and had in effect become a peer group. The last time the author visited them, they said they just hired the services of an African prostitute (one servicing six people, including two others who were not interviewed – *pila balde* as it is known in street terms). It was also this same group that discovered an illegal kinky sex shop in downtown Jeddah where a Korean woman sells aphrodisiacs and various drugs such as those that prolong erection. This group also makes a point of stopping in Thailand for a Roman-style bath before returning to the Philippines for vacation. Our key informants confirmed this behavior. They add that it has become common for workers to maintain girlfriends in Hong Kong whom they met through pen pal columns and they visit on their way to the Philippines.

One male nurse mentioned dating another male nurse, who is gay, when he cannot get a female date. He said, "*Pag talagang homesick na, baklaan time na.*" There are, furthermore, a number of male workers who have come out of the closet about being gay ("*nagbaba na ng kapa*" or "has laid down his cape" in the lingo of the gays) to the other residents in their villas. Some are so "pretty" they participate in a clandestine kingdom-wide gay beauty contest called "Ms. Gay Saudi Arabia."

The most imaginative way of coping with sexual repression was perhaps that of a cargo truck driver in Jeddah who had the ring around his penis implanted with *bolitas* (small bearings). This minor surgical operation costs 200 riyals (US\$ 67) and can be performed even by a nurse. Inserting *bolitas* is actually a preparation for the much-awaited home vacation. It is alleged that the sexual partner will derive more pleasure because the circumference of the penis has been enlarged.

How the workers view themselves generally refers to an inner reflection within their whole consciousness. However, according to

Schutz, "What is primordially given to consciousness is an unbroken stream of lived experiences (*Erlebnisse*) -- heterogenous qualities without boundaries or contours which wax, wane and pass gradually into one another."⁵⁰ In this particular study we limited our focus on the area of aspirations, political views, religious beliefs, sexual thoughts and behavior of the workers.

In terms of aspiration, the typical course of action is consistent with the "in-order to" motive of going abroad, i.e., the workers went to Saudi "in-order to" have a better life, most likely in an attempt to spare their family from the hardships that marked their own childhoods. Usually the motivation was stated thus: "*Ayaw naming maranasan nila* (referring to the children) *ang pinagdaanan namin.*" (We don't want them to experience what we have been through.)

The course of action in relation to political views is again logical considering that the workers are openly and vocally defiant when their interest in overseas work is threatened or undermined, such as when the Philippine government enforces mandatory remittance with severe penalties.

With regard to religious beliefs and practices, an area generally considered quite personal, the course of action varies according to the personalities involved because there is really no centralized view of religion.

There are certain similarities between the courses of action taken for sexual behavior and for religious practices. Again, this area is very personal and the so-called sexual norm is subject to interpretation. But given that the majority of the respondents were male, the gender which is traditionally more sexually active, the various responses to sexual restrictions involved a wide array of practices. The majority of workers would just bear the loneliness and distract themselves with all sorts of hobbies. For example, one worker would gather and take care of all the stray cats in the neighborhood.⁵¹

Nonetheless, as long as the contract workers do not suffer delays in pay, they can adjust to being separated from their home and family. However, this constant struggle between wanting to earn dollars and giving in to homesickness is the biggest factor determining their

⁵⁰Schutz, *Phenomenology*, *loc.cit.*

⁵¹Cf. Elena L. Samonte. "Sources of Stress and Coping Mechanisms Among Filipinas in West Germany and Holland" in *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, Volume 25, Number 1, June 1992, for added discussion on how Filipinos cope while working overseas.

aspirations, political views and to some extent, their religious and sexual views and practices.

This is consistent so far with the assertion in the preceding section that the response system of Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia is highly influenced by their pursuit of money through overseas employment.

The workers' encounters with their co-workers

Prolonged encounters among people tends to foster strong bonds of friendship and camaraderie, particularly when the individuals in question undergo a shared social experience. In the case of Saudi workers, it is the pang of lonely nights, the tedious humdrum day-to-day existence and the sense of entrapment in a prison without bars (the workers look upon Saudi Arabia as a "*bilangguang walang rehas*"). But the workers also share the joys of receiving a letter or a voice tape, the seemingly endless *bangkaan* on Thursday nights over cups of coffee or jiggers of *sadike* (the home-made fermented alcoholic drink), the payroll on the 20th of the month and many other small delights.

Camaraderie, however, is not the same as solidarity. The question now is whether the workers, in their months if not years of being together, can go beyond the level of personal, emotional relationships to identify and understand the common thread that binds them politically as workers. Do the workers perceive themselves as belonging to a specific "class" situation in the Weberian sense of sharing a location "with those who are similarly placed in the process of production, distribution and exchange?"⁵² Is there a class identification or what the British sociologist Michael Mann describes as "the definition of oneself as working-class, as playing a distinctive role in common with other workers in the productive process?"⁵³

A number of scholars have recently defined levels of class consciousness in relatively similar terms in an attempt to elaborate on Marx's distinction between a "class in itself" and a "class for itself." The lowest level of consciousness, they say, is manifested in the members'

⁵²W.G. Runciman, "The Three Dimensions of Social Inequality," in *Social Inequality*, Andre Beteille (ed.), (England: Penguin, 1974), p. 47.

⁵³Michael Mann, *Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class* (London: British Sociological Association, 1973), p. 13.

awareness of their identity as a class. Next comes the conscious perception of their specific interests and a growing understanding of the means by which their objectives might be attained. The "highest" form, that of revolutionary consciousness, is attained when "workers see their struggle as constituting a (necessary) process of historical change."⁶⁴

Class identity

When directly asked to what class they belonged, 92.50 percent of the interviewees could not answer the question. Revising the question to whether they agree or disagree that the company where they work is divided into owners, managers, supervisors and workers, all (100 percent) the interviewees agreed that such a structure exists. When asked about the basis of this structure, 92.50 percent said it was due to the ownership of the business and their role as workers. It was commonly expressed this way: "*Siyempre, ang mga Arabo ang may-ari ng negosyo at kami ang nagtatrabaho.*" The remaining three respondents (7.50 percent) don't know the answer. But when the question was reformulated to "How do workers differ from owners and managers?," the three respondents then answered that they are the ones working and the owners are not. And when asked, "Where does this situation come from?," 47.50 percent answered "from ownership of capital." Thirty percent said they do not know, while 17.50 percent replied, "*Ganoon ang takbo ng buhay*" (That is how life goes). The remaining 5 percent said it was due to the "existing system."

Based on the responses above and their observed behavior, the identification of the workers as belonging to the working class is minimal, if not totally absent. While they are aware of the basic difference between them and the capitalists, they have not located the deeper implications of such a structure.

Castles and Kosack's theoretical formulation on the matter of class consciousness formation may help explain why class identification is sometimes hindered, as in the case of Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia:

Although an individual's class position is determined in the first place by his position in the production process, it would be wrong to think that the objective economic factor is the only determinant. On the contrary, considerable emphasis is put on

⁶⁴Peter Lloyd, *A Third World Proletariat?* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1982), p. 40.

subjective factors in the formation of class consciousness. Common economic conditions and interests determine that a group of people objectively form a class ('class in itself'). But they can act as a class only when they come to realize their common interests and that there are other classes with different -- usually opposite -- interests. The development of class consciousness is the precondition for true existence ('class for itself'), and this is only possible when the relationship of dependence and exploitation with other classes are understood. Classes do not exist independently, but only in relation to each other. Class consciousness inevitably leads to political organization and class struggle. But class consciousness does not develop mechanically out of material conditions according to some abstract sociological laws. It is the result of diverse cultural and historical factors, which may have different effects in different historical phases of conflict between labor and capital.⁵⁵

Unity based on race

The workers interviewed have some sense of the class structure but still do not really think and act along class lines. For example, when asked whether they would help fellow Filipino workers who are in need, all answered in the positive. When asked why, almost all said because they are fellow Filipinos and it is expected that compatriots (*kabayán*) help one another. Or as they put it, "*Sino pa ba ang magtutulungan dito kundi kaming mga Pilipino?*" (Who else will help one another but us Filipinos?). When asked next whether or not they would help a non-Filipino worker, many of them became less definite, with 40 percent answering a conditional "maybe" (*siguro*) and 30 percent answering "not sure." Ten percent said they would not help and only twenty percent gave a categorical "yes" answer.

Offhand, one might say that the sense of solidarity among Filipino contract workers is based on ethnicity and race (*kapwa Pinoy*), as with other Third World "workers." In fact, Lloyd hypothesized that "Ethnic loyalty tends to be a more powerful sentiment than class interest."⁵⁶ Inherent in this notion of ethnicity is the feeling of *malasakit* or compassion for people considered one's own. Many workers described several occasions when they themselves got into trouble rescuing fellow

⁵⁵Castles and Kosack, "Immigrant Workers and Class Structure," in *An Introduction to Sociology*, Robert Bockock, et.al. (eds.), (Glasgow: The Open University Press, 1983), p. 301.

⁵⁶Lloyd, *op.cit.*, p. 82.

Filipinos in distress. Many terminated workers subsisted for several months on "donations" and "chip-ins" of fellow Filipino workers before they were repatriated. The workers do this, not because they are fellow workers, but rather because they are *kabayán*.

New internationalism?

A majority (87.50 percent) of the respondents work with people of other nationalities. Aside from the Saudi and Caucasian supervisors who are all referred to as *Amerikano* even if they are not Americans), there are many Indians, Pakistanis and Thais. One female nurse even works with nine Chinese from the People's Republic of China. There are smaller numbers of Egyptians, Tunisians, Bangladeshis and Sri Lankans. Of all these other nationalities, 75 percent of the interviewees said they do not favor any particular group. Three interviewees (7.5 percent) picked the Thais for being friendly, quiet and just like the Filipinos ("*parang Pinoy din*"). One (2.5 percent) said he likes his Egyptian boss because the latter is good to him and respects the Filipinos. The female nurse working with the Chinese said she gets along fine with them, except that they cannot communicate much because the Chinese nurses don't speak enough English and the only Mandarin she knows are the numbers one to ten.

As for disliking the least any particular nationality, again 75 percent could not specify. Five respondents (12.50 percent) said they like the Indians the least. The reasons given are that: the Indians "smell bad" (one respondent says it feels like being tear gassed when he rides with them in their small shuttle bus), they do not know anything; and they are *sipsip* or suckers – to management.

It was also noted that none of the respondents have any friends belonging to other nationalities.⁵⁷ In fact, during the visits to numerous camps and public places like markets and shopping malls, there were no mixed ethnic groupings. Workers tend to group according to their own nationality. In most if not all residential quarters we visited, workers are housed according to nationality. Filipinos sleep among fellow Filipinos, Indians among fellow Indians and so on. In one company (RISCO), the various ethnic groups even have separate kitchen and dining halls outside the segregated dormitories.

⁵⁷See for instance Stephen Bochner's discussion of cross-cultural relations and social support from in-groups in Stephen Bochner, *Culture in Contact* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982), pp. 5-44.

Lack of interaction in leisure, dining and even in work activities is reinforced by the language barrier. Other Asian nationalities like the Thais and the Koreans are not very fluent in English, the foreign language most familiar to the Filipino workers. Thus, workers rarely form new and stronger international ties, a definite barrier to solidarity among the working class.

Class interest and trade union organization

The workers's perception of the class structure is affected by a vague, if not oblivious perception of their class interest. For instance, when asked the question: "As a worker, what are your important objectives and interest in the future?" the only noteworthy answer was to have job security (17.50 percent). The rest associate see their interest as workers with their ability to save money.

Although the workers are not concerned with their class interest, they are somehow aware of the repressive labor policies of the Saudi authorities. Most of them, however, accept the conditions, saying that nothing will come of their protests and, worse, they might even be deported. This is a risk they would not want to take as they have already sacrificed so much. Moreover, some say everything is alright as long as they are paid well and on time.

Notably there is a low level of organization among the workers even prior to contract migration. From among the interviewees, a high 72.50 percent (29 out of 40) had no membership whatsoever in any professional organization, trade union, or political party. Of the 11 interviewees (27.50 percent) who used to belong to an organization, five (or 12.50 percent) were members of professional associations (like the Philippine Nurses Association for the four female nurses in a focused group discussion), three (7.50 percent) were former trade unionists and three (7.50 percent) used to belong to a political movement. These figures support the finding of a UP study of 15 percent membership for professional associations, 14 percent membership for clubs and 7 percent membership for trade unions.⁵⁸

While all forms of organization, with the exception of Islamic groupings, are implicitly prohibited by Saudi labor law, Filipinos do not show much interest in organizing themselves anyway. While there is

⁵⁸Arcinas, Eanзон-Bautista and David, *op.cit.* p. 154.

disinterest in actually joining organizations, many workers have an open attitude toward the existence of trade unions in the kingdom. Seventy-five percent of the interviewees said they are in favor of having trade unions in Saudi Arabia. At least, they perceive trade unions as a vehicle for articulating their demands for better working terms. Regarding their right to strike, there is some vacillation, as only 23 interviewees (57.50 percent) said that this should be recognized to ensure the protection of workers's rights. The rest were simply too intimidated by the explicit prohibition on strikes. "*Bawal dito 'yon*" (It is prohibited here.), they would always say. This suggests how deeply fear is instilled in them by Saudi labor laws. The workers repeat stories they have heard about punishments such as public lashing, beheading, imprisonment and the severing of fingers for some real or imagined crimes by fellow workers.

Only four interviewees (all belonging to one company – aluminum pipe-fitting) have actually participated in strikes or other protest action. It is interesting to note that one of the respondents was a former trade unionist belonging to the Trade Union of the Philippines and Allied Services (TUPAS), a left-leaning labor federation. They went on strike to protest delays in their salary. And because it was a united stand (all 33 employees joined), they got their demand without any trouble with the Saudi authorities.

The two other former trade unionists from the Philippine Airlines (PAL) who now work for Saudia also tried organizing workers into some sort of self-help project. But this fizzled out due to the indifference of the workers. According to the two, their co-workers seem contented.

If one were to gauge the militancy of these workers who went on strike, one would still say that the level of consciousness is still relatively low. They are militant compared with the rest who do not dare protest even gross violations of their rights. However, the strike mentioned above was not directed against capitalist relations but, rather, focused on the "unfulfilled promises" of management, thus reinforcing and perpetuating an exploitative structure. "Class-conscious workers," according to Lloyd, "would be expected to relate wages to their firm's profits, demanding a greater share of the cake."⁵⁹

The low level of organization among contract workers undermines whatever power their class might have. Except for a few respondents (12.50 percent) who were politicalized in the Philippines, the rest tend to associate an improvement in their lives and in society with their financial

⁵⁹Lloyd, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

success in Saudi Arabia. Even the five interviewees who believe in some form of collective action are still unable to explain in detail their ideas on social change brought about by the workers's *sama-samang paghilos* (collective action).

Despite their prolonged encounters, workers have little identification or sense of solidarity as a distinct class. The "ideal" relation among workers in such a situation would compel them to recognize that they do not own or control the means of production and its resulting relations which favor the property-owning class.

Many factors would account for such a low level of class identification. For one, even prior to migration, most of these contract workers were not organized. While they may be more skilled or better educated, they have almost no trade union experience. Secondly, the political and cultural factors at work discourage collective labor actions like forming unions and practicing democratic rights. Another factor is tied to the dominant value that determines their entire response system. That is, in order to continuously earn a relatively higher salary, the contract workers take the path of least resistance, enduring injustice and exploitation. Still, a fourth factor is that not all these people are industrial workers. For example, no one is engaged in manufacturing, an economic activity where the extraction of surplus value is easily identifiable and where workers are more prone to organization.

This ambiguous perception of the class structure, lack of class identification and disregard for class interests result in an almost complete failure to harness their group potential to effect social change.

The low level of class consciousness (the orthodox Marxists would call it "false consciousness") also hinders their relations with workers of other nationalities. Such a low sense of solidarity is aggravated by language barriers and policies that preclude interaction in work, rest and leisure. Fortunately, there is a stronger bond based on ethnic solidarity. Workers go out of their way to help and support their fellow *kababayan* (compatriots).

Conclusion

People's responses vary given various situations. The course of action they take depends on many factors, including historical precedents, prevailing objective conditions and the nature or character of concerned individuals.

In the early years of international labor outmigration, when the principal destination was North America, the primary motive for action was also basically economic. However, their situation and courses of action they took were not the same as those taken by the contract workers in Saudi Arabia now.

In the first wave of outmigration, the majority of migrant workers in the United States were peasants who underwent severe exploitation as workers. Their efforts at collective protest were possible in the more "democratic" atmosphere of America where trade union organizing was allowed. The severe exploitation itself was enough to compel the workers to improve their miserable conditions.

In the second wave of outmigration, the profile of the Filipino migrant workers changed dramatically from those of peasant origins to the college-educated professionals who typically came from the middle and upper classes. The objective condition confronting this group stems from America's effort to recover after the Great Economic Depression so their corresponding responses were different from the first wave of migrants. They tried to adapt to their new environment and so did not resort to collective action, like strikes, that tend to disrupt the dominant order. Colonial discourse prevailed through American-oriented education so much that this second wave seemed to view themselves as "little brown Americans."

The current third wave of migrant workers flock to the Middle East, in particular, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. At the time the study was conducted, there were more than 90,000 Filipino overseas contract workers in Saudi Arabia. They populate various types of enterprises, such as prime contractors, joint ventures, small and local establishments, private employers (mostly for domestic helpers) and government-run offices and establishments, like airports and hospitals. The subjects of this study do not vary considerably from those samples recorded in other major research, including the Philippine government's own surveys. Many surveys on contract workers reveal that they are in their most productive years, and, most likely, at the prime of their health. The males far outnumber the females (nine to one), with the big majority being married. It has also been noted that they are better educated than their Philippine counterparts, more mobile and have had extensive work experience before working abroad. It is also interesting to note that they belong predominantly to the lower petty-bourgeoisie (48 percent), with only a small percentage (20 percent) coming from the peasantry.

Saudi Arabia is a totally different world from the United States. The workers do not even have the "benefit" of being acculturated by colonial experience prior to contract migration. Migrating to Saudi Arabia is like being transported to another world where the workers are pushed to the limits of their will power, *tibay ng dibdib* (fortitude) and *lakas ng loob* (strength of spirit). It is a country that has the amenities of the 21st century but the cultural, political and legal superstructures of medieval Islam can threaten and confound first-time visitors. Undoubtedly, such "alien practices" like prohibiting alcoholic drinks and movie houses, covering women from head to toe with dreary black robes before they leave the house and outlawing all forms of non-Muslim organization, have a telling effect on the way a worker would look, feel, think and act.

The most compelling reason why these workers leave the country to work in Saudi Arabia is for them to be economically secure. Economic security is defined by the ability to finance the education of their children, buying a house and lot or starting a business. Other research on returned workers confirm these conclusions.

The goal they set for themselves prior to migration greatly determines the kind of responses they make when faced with the actual material conditions in their place of work, leisure and rest. In fact, the pursuit of a higher income through overseas employment essentially governs their entire response system, from their internal reflections to their social relations with co-workers to their response to objective "market and work situations."

The quest for higher income, which they hope will guarantee their future, motivates them to tolerate almost any negative factor they encounter in Saudi Arabia, be it the pangs of loneliness and homesickness, maltreatment or *pambabastos* from the employers, or the "weirdness" of the Saudi culture. "*Iniiisip na lang namin na hindi namin kikitain sa Pilipinas ang kinikita namin dito. Kaya, nagtitiis na lang kami sa nakikita o naririnig namin.*" (We just tell ourselves that we will not earn this kind of money back home. That is why we just bear with whatever it is that we see or hear.)

As if to convince themselves, a number of workers display posters of the U.S. dollar in their rooms. Almost weekly, they turn to the consumer goods displayed at the supermarkets, malls and *suq*, as sources of motivation to stay put and work. Come payday their fatigue seems to vanish when they receive their pay envelopes. "*Pag-suweldo, naglalaho lahat ng pagod namin.*"

It is only logical that loneliness and homesickness are the biggest consequences of working overseas since, after all, it was concern for their family that brought them to Saudi Arabia. This concern for the family and for steadily earning higher income determine the workers's thinking and action. In Saudi, most Filipino overseas workers experience a surge in financial status after a year or two of full employment. This often leads workers to adopt middle-class values and lifestyles despite of the fact that they actually have little job security and only minimal chances for upward occupational mobility. Nevertheless, they accept these things matter-of-factly and are not deterred, confirming Keyser's observation about contract workers in general. He said, "The (contract) worker is mainly concerned with obtaining a high salary, save money and return home as fast as possible"⁶⁰ (Insertion supplied.)

The workers's typical course of action concerning given market and work situations is one of passivity and tolerance, if not one of acceptance. "*Alam naman namin at ginusto naman namin ang pinasukan namin.*" (We know and we have decided to enter into this situation.) They reason that they were contracted to work for a specific sum of money in a different work environment so they behave accordingly.

For instance, in their self-perceptions, the workers are mainly concerned about the future of their own families so even their political views and actions (or inaction, as the case may be) are, to a large extent, shaped by considerations of their families's welfare. For example, they displayed more disapproval of the Marcos regime when it interfered with their earnings and their remittances to their family. Even in something as private as religious worship, the family figures prominently in the prayers of the workers who feel helpless to fend for them when they are so far away.

As for their social relations with their co-workers, whether fellow Filipinos or of other nationalities, the contract workers do not perceive themselves as constituting an exploited class. The "ideal" type of relation builds on the realization that they constitute a "class-in-itself." This has not materialized. Consequently, there is little understanding of their class interests and almost no appreciation of their class capacity to exact social progress. This being the case, encounters among workers are based more than anything else on basic camaraderie, and ethnic and racial considerations.

⁶⁰Labor Relations Division, Ministry of Labor and Employment (MOLE), *Insights Into Temporary Labor Migration: The case of Filipino Workers in Iran*, mimeographed paper, 1980, p. 4.

From all indications, there exists what Michael Mann calls the "segmentation of life (which) constitutes an obstacle to the realization of class consciousness."⁶¹ The workers are thus unable to connect and relate their work, their family life and their migration with the structures and ensuing relations of production, the country's economic and political crisis and so on.

At least not yet, because what is apparent, despite all these misperceptions, is the fact that the Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia have endured. The extreme weather, nagging homesickness and unfavorable social and work relations are interpreted through a value system that enables the workers to cope and survive. This value system is shaped by such factors as the realization that much has been invested in the migration (e.g., money, time and effort) and the sense of *hiya* (shame) if they were to go home "defeated." Thus, workers seem able to put up with almost everything.

Human behavior is oriented to a certain "action-model" which, at first glance, may seem illogical or unnatural but later turns out to be logical and therefore, explainable. Such an action-model presupposes a set of responses and norms which an individual will instinctively observe. Deviation brings corresponding sanctions or consequences. Generally, in real life situations, as long as people know beforehand what is coming to them, i.e., the "rules" and "penalties" of the "game," people fulfill the expected course of action. The situations of contract workers in Saudi Arabia demonstrates this in many instances.

Nevertheless, the Filipino overseas contract workers in Saudi Arabia can be organized. While they realize that strikes and unions are officially prohibited in the kingdom, they react whenever their economic interests are threatened. For example, when the late President Marcos decreed forced remittance through an executive order (E.O. 857), many of them spontaneously wrote letters to the editors of the two English newspapers in the kingdom. The most appropriate type of organization for these workers is not the union, but other types, like sports organizations, varsitarian or regional organizations and cooperatives like credit unions. Such organizations can build a sense of unity as compatriots and fellow migrant workers.

Saudi Arabia is not a complete garrison state. One can move around and communicate with fellow workers. So long as the Saudi monarchy, religion or economy are not the targets of the workers's organizing, there

⁶¹Mann, *loc. cit.*

is some measure of tolerance. For instance, the fact that Filipino reading materials, like *Liwayway* are allowed and workers can write letters to the editors of the two English newspapers in Saudi suggests that there is potential for political conscientization.

Another approach to organizing lies in the area of ethnic or racial solidarity, rather than the traditional trade unionism approach. The Filipino overseas contract workers's solidarity as compatriots is strengthened by the fact that they are all working outside the country, and this represents a more obvious commonality than their social status as workers. Then, once the workers are organized into non-union types of organization, they can more effectively negotiate for certain reforms from both the host government and the Philippine government to improve their working and living condition. Specifically, they can work for such migrant concerns as the signing of bilateral labor agreements between the host country and the Philippine government, adoption of the International Labor Organization's (ILO) Conventions on Migrant Workers and implementation of worker-oriented labor employment policies and programs that would insure the protection of workers's rights. These alternative types of organizations which are also constrained (though not as repressed as labor unions) are still able to overcome these limitations, in an ingenious way. Such organizations may even pave the way to raising the class consciousness of the Filipino contract workers.

This research presents many other possible areas for study in the phenomenon of labor outmigration. For one, the study has not thoroughly explored the aspect of class consciousness formation. Due to lack of latitudinal data on consciousness formation, it cannot authoritatively speak about the issue, especially in terms of Marxist theory. At best, it can only raise the debate on whether revolutionary consciousness is borne out of an external political force (i.e. the vanguard political party of the proletariat) or can be engendered solely by the severe exploitation inherent in the capitalist mode of production. Other approaches may include taking a deeper look into the class background of the contract workers and the fact that they are contracted temporarily as opposed to, for example, working in the United States where there is greater possibility of settling. The spheres into which the study divided the workers's life and work conditions deserve further scrutiny. Studies in other disciplines, like psychology for example, can take a closer look into the workers's perceptions of themselves, or make a deeper analysis of the workers's coping mechanism. Another interesting theoretical perspective traces the saga of the self in

circumstances of sustained restriction within a setting of what Erving Goffman calls the "total institution."⁶² Further studies can be made on the adaptive behavior and the "underlife" of Filipino contract workers in Saudi Arabia.

Two important stages have not been covered by the study, i.e., the stage prior to deployment abroad and the post-migration stage. It would be interesting to compare changes in attitude, beliefs and behaviors at each stage of outmigration as affected by different objective material conditions.

Policymakers will hopefully see the inadequacies of using one-shot surveys for data-base formation. International outmigration is a very complex phenomenon that must be thoroughly studied by policymakers. After all, it is human beings that we are exporting and not just mere commodities. The process of outmigration has serious repercussions not only to the government and the economy, but also to the families left behind and the contract workers themselves. Labor outmigration changes people – their values, attitudes and behavior. Expectations are created. Demands are made. We can not always presume that the course of action undertaken by contract workers is the best or the only way.

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⁶²Erving Goffman, *Asylums, Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates* (Chicago, Illinois: Aldine Publishing, 1962).

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