

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

The Labor Trade

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Philippine Studies vol. 37, no. 1 (1989) 122–124

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

100-01). From the theological reflection of the author, EDSA is (1) a salvific event appropriated in faith; (2) an ecclesial event; (3) the triumph of grace over sin; (4) the edge of the desert. Although EDSA already belongs to a historical past, it is still a token of the possible as well as an unfinished revolution.

The author would be the first to admit that his essays are incomplete, that they are "soundings or explorations," "jumpingboards for further reflection." They constitute a very worthwhile contribution nonetheless.

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THE LABOR TRADE: FILIPINO MIGRANT WORKERS AROUND THE WORLD. Authors not given. London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1987. 137 pages.

The Labor Trade is anecdotal in nature and therefore easy to read. Unfortunately its anecdotal nature undermines the strength of its scholarship and the weight of its conclusions. We should therefore view this book as being primarily aimed at the heart—to inspire us to become more involved in these human tragedies—rather than aimed at the mind—to provide us with a blueprint for solving some of these problems.

No authors are given for the book. But from the acknowledgements it appears that the book was put together by the staff of the Catholic Institute for International Relations in London with the assistance of various individuals associated with the Friends of Filipino Migrant Workers (Kaibigan) in Manila, National Secretariat for Social Action (NASSA) in Manila, the Mission for Filipino Migrant Workers in Hong Kong, the Commission for Filipino Migrant Workers in London, Concerned Seamen of the Philippines, Center for Seafarers' Rights, and the Philippine Resource Center in Berkeley.

The authors focus on the human dimension of Filipino emigration, with the emphasis almost always placed on the negative side with its host of human tragedies. This bias is what the economist Gerald Meier calls the "economics of discontent" and many of its tenants are commonly associated with the Philippine "nationalist" school. If read uncritically it may either lull us into an unproductive fatalism or drive us into a destructive rage.

Today Filipinos are scattered throughout 124 different countries. There are approximately 3.25 million Filipinos living outside the Philippines and 60 percent live in the Americas, primarily in the United States and Canada. Of all Filipinos abroad, roughly half a million are short term contract workers for the most part working in the Middle East.

Filipino migration may have first begun on 20 December 1906 when fifteen Ilocanos arrived in Hawaii to work on the Olaa sugar plantation. Ever since, Hawaii has apparently become a favored destination for Ilocanos of all ranks. Unfortunately, with the Stock Market Crash in 1929 and the ensuing Depres-

sion there were few jobs for Filipinos in the United States. Due to these harsh economic conditions Filipinos suffered greatly from discrimination and racism, particularly in California, as they competed with Americans for the few jobs available. After the Second World War, the United States passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act which restricted immigration from Asian nations, thus limiting the inflow of Filipinos. But in the 1960s both the United States and Canada relaxed their immigration laws and many Filipinos took advantage of the changes. By the early 70s an oil boom had come to the Middle East and martial law to the Philippines. As the Philippine economy began to limp and eventually collapse, increasing numbers of Filipinos headed for North America and the Middle East in search of good paying jobs.

The Labor Trade contains three parts. Part one explores the conditions in the Philippines that have given rise to the widespread emigration of Filipinos in search of jobs. It begins by describing the emotional anguish that many families must endure as loved ones leave for foreign employment. Next there is an all-too-short history of Filipino migration. Finally in part one, the book considers the Philippine government's regulation of labor migration. Here, by being so anecdotal, the authors fail at an important point to take a biting and critical look at the Philippine government's role. There is a dissertation in economics waiting to be written to determine whether the government actually regulated labor migration to benefit the nation as a whole or to insure that the powerful in Philippine society got their traditional cut.

The second part of *The Labor Trade* is a description of the various countries where Filipinos work. There are sections on the United States, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Asian-Pacific region, and one on seafarers—those migrants who work aboard cargo and cruise ships. The largest sections are on the United States and the Middle East. On one hand the book claims that Filipinos face "widespread racism and discrimination" in the United States, while on the other hand the book states that Filipino families on the U.S. East Coast earn higher salaries than average American families. Certainly there is discrimination in the United States, but apparently America still remains a land of opportunities for immigrants with the right skills, in this case medical skills.

During their discussion of the Middle East the authors raise an important question that will confront the Philippines in the immediate future. The oil boom is not what it used to be. There will be fewer jobs in the Middle East. The authors wonder what will happen when these Filipino contract workers, used to earning high wages, must return to a Philippine economy not yet ready to receive them.

Finally in the third part of the book, the authors look at the economic costs of migration. It is an apt title, since little attention is paid to the economic benefits of migration. Of course there are costs, but many Filipinos over many years have chosen to bear these costs in order to secure the benefits. Before making a judgement against the trade in Filipino migrant workers, I for one would want to look more carefully at the benefits that would be lost.

Let me conclude by recommending this book to others. It has its biases and limitations, but it brings forth the human dimension so clearly. The various

human tragedies documented, from racism and discrimination to prostitution and mail-order brides, make one wonder why such things must occur. Certainly the trade in Filipinas that this author has encountered and that this book documents poignantly, demonstrates the evils that avarice and poverty can foster.

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