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Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr.

Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood and Class Relations in a Globalized Age

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Book Reviews

FILOMENO V. AGUILAR JR.

Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood and Class Relations in a Globalized Age

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014. 293 pages.

Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood and Class Relations in a Globalized Age is a major contribution to Philippine studies. With his latest book, Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr has given us an impressive analysis of migration and class relations in a globalized world. This book is not only relevant for students of migration but more importantly for scholars interested in the consequences of modernity, particularly its effects on class and popular culture. It will stimulate much debate about the nature and origins of a national consciousness and the formation of a national imaginary in an increasingly global and pan-national condition.

While most of the essays in this book have been published earlier, subsequently revised and rewritten as chapters for this publication, *Migration Revolution* reads as a seamless collection of related topics. These chapters cover the experiences of Filipino seafarers and their intrepid voyages to distant lands where some eventually settled. They also deal with the issue of global labor and its effects on subjectivity, including notions of shame and betrayal for having left the homeland. Notions of citizenship in an increasingly flexible and transient mobility are critically and originally explored, including attempts by the nation-state to incorporate its extraterritorial citizens. The concluding chapter on transnationalism gives us tantalizing,

if necessarily incomplete, insights on contemporary aporias. All these topics interpenetrate, and Aguilar provides us with many important insights in an increasingly transhuman global condition.

While migration has attracted much interest both globally as well as in the Philippines, surprisingly little serious academic research has been conducted in this field, apart from the economic and policy implications of this phenomenon. Aguilar's contribution addresses this gap in the literature as it relates the historical origins of migration with contemporary factors such as the progressive intercalation of the global economy and culture. The strength of this publication lies in its broad treatment of the topic and in expanding the analysis to include neighboring countries in Southeast Asia such as Indonesia. His observation that the Philippine workforce (referring to nineteenth-century Filipino seamen) was, in the first instance, global before it became national reveals the historical and cultural complexities of this phenomenon (58). The book's historical chapter locates the contemporary condition of migrant labor and transnational consciousness within a wider perspective rarely encountered in the literature.

Aguilar's grasp of both the theoretical and empirical literature is impressive; not much escapes his critical gaze. In addition, he has drawn widely from his cosmopolitan and diverse academic postings such as his lectureships in Singapore and Australia before joining the Department of History at the Ateneo de Manila University, where he is currently based. Trained as a sociologist but drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, he guides the reader through a complex field with remarkable ease.

Nevertheless, I would have wanted a fuller discussion of several issues affecting both migrants and their home communities. The notion of a globalized homeland has received some attention recently (e.g., Leopoldina Fortunati, Raul Pertierra, and Jane Vincent, eds., *Migration, Diaspora, and Information Technology in Global Societies*, Routledge, 2012). Also, a recent study of the role of the new media in maintaining ties between Filipina mothers based in London and relatives in their home villages is provided by Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller (*Migration and the New Media: Transnational Families and Polymedia*, Routledge, 2012). These studies raise issues discussed by Aguilar in a pre-social media era. However, they are relatively recent publications and may have preceded Aguilar's essays. A more puzzling omission, given Aguilar's encyclopedic grasp of the literature, is the book by Greg Bankoff and Kathleen Weekley (*Post-Colonial National*

Identity in the Philippines: Celebrating the Centennial of Independence, Ashgate, 2002). While this latter study mainly discusses the 1998 centennial celebrations, its suggestions regarding a postnational, transnational, or regional consciousness support most of Aguilar's earlier contentions. This is perhaps not surprising since the authors are familiar with Aguilar's writings on the topic.

The topic of sexuality is not mentioned by Aguilar, except for a passing mention of lax village moral standards and the acceptance of the Japayuki. Surely an important consequence of this migration revolution is the opening of alternate sexualities so tightly controlled in the local discourse. The antics of "Saudi boys" on their way back home while visiting Hong Kong and other ports are common knowledge, as well as the behavior of Filipino seafarers while visiting foreign ports. Equally well known are the indiscretions of husbands and wives whose spouses are overseas. Here Aguilar could have profited from Alicia Pingol's *Remaking Masculinities: Identity, Power, and Gender Dynamics in Families with Migrant Wives and Househusbands* (University of the Philippines Press, 2001), a pioneering study of masculine Ilocano sexuality caught in the web of absent spouses. The effects of migration on family stability have also been receiving much attention recently. The other area Aguilar neglects is the significance of religious practice among migrants. The strong presence of Filipinos in overseas congregations is easily observed, particularly in formerly staunch Catholic countries such as Spain and Italy. Aguilar has himself participated actively in these overseas congregations while living abroad. Finally, Aguilar could have given more attention to the consequences of the new communications technology on migrants and their village kin. Important studies on migration, diaspora, and ICT have appeared in the last few years. This neglect may be due to the fact that most chapters were written over a decade ago. However, more contemporary insights are provided in Aguilar's final chapter, including an incisive discussion of the incorporation of overseas migrants and dual-nationals in reimagining the nation in postnational and global conditions; in other words, the possibility of a globalized homeland.

Despite these shortcomings, I am not quibbling about the importance of this book. It will be recognized as a major study of Philippine migration and its historical roots as well as its cultural consequences. Aguilar writes well, and one reads his chapters as though they were journalistic accounts rather

than serious academic research. There is no doubt about the thoroughness of his investigations.

My final quibbles refer to minor points: one is the small print or font of the Ateneo Press version, making reading the text sometimes difficult; the other is a presumably mistaken reference on page 78 to a domestic worker returning home to purchase 10,000 hectares for her poor relatives.

I congratulate the academic institutions in Singapore (NUS Press) and Kyoto (Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University) for recognizing the importance of these essays and encouraging their republication as a book. I can only hope that studies of this standard become more common among Filipino scholars and their Southeast Asian counterparts. Aguilar has shown us the great merits of exhaustive scholarship combined with lucid writing. We remain in his debt.

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AXEL BORCHGREVINK

Clean and Green: Knowledge and Morality in a Philippine Farming Community

Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014. 292 pages.

Skillfully combining approaches that highlight morality and knowledge, Axel Borchgrevink's *Clean and Green: Knowledge and Morality in a Philippine Farming Community* presents an insightful analysis of village social dynamics in Bohol. The book is a welcome addition to ethnographies of Philippine lowland rice-farming communities. Like many of the strongest works in this tradition, Borchgrevink's monograph paints a detailed picture of rural life—rich in characters and stories that alternate between the magical and the everyday—to illustrate how morality pervades practices, beliefs, and behaviors in a tight-knit community. Morality is not an essentialized, unchanging black box but is instead a dynamic kind of knowledge internalized and constituted through experiences, social interactions, and emotions.

Trained as an anthropologist and currently an associate professor at Oslo and Akershus University College in Norway, Borchgrevink draws