

**Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr., *Migration Revolution: Philippine Nationhood and Class Relations in a Globalized Age*.** Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2014. xxii+293 pp.

The publication of *Migration Revolution* across four university presses in four countries—Ateneo de Manila in the Philippines, National University of Singapore in Singapore, Kyoto University in Japan, and the University of Hawai’i in the United States—attests to the significance of the Philippines as a major subject of Asia-Pacific migration studies. That overseas Filipino workers generate not only copious remittances but intense interest in the international scholarly community should not be so surprising, given the unceasing increase and diversification of labor migrant streams from the Philippines in the last forty years. Rather, it is the timeliness of *Migration Revolution*’s publication that underlines both its signal contribution to existing studies of the Philippine diaspora, and its potential impact on the future agenda of migration research: 2015 statistics mark the number of overseas Filipino workers at a peak figure of 2.4 million,<sup>1</sup> continuing the accelerating deployment of migrant workers over the last decade.<sup>2</sup> By re-presenting his pioneering research at this specific historical juncture, Aguilar reveals the deeper and subtler implications of these numbers. Using a much-needed diachronic and ethnographic approach, he depicts the contemporary diaspora of Philippine migrant labor as a “new inflection to, and a resolution on a world-historical scale of,” the social, cultural, and political project of Philippine independence and nationhood (2). In doing so, *Migration Revolution* sounds an urgent call to scholars to critically read migration in light

<sup>1</sup> Philippine Statistics Authority (2016), *2015 Survey on Overseas Filipinos*. Available online at <https://psa.gov.ph/content/2015-survey-overseas-filipinos-0>, accessed 14 September 2016.

<sup>2</sup> International Organization for Migration and Scalibrini Migration Center (2013), *Country Migration Report: The Philippines 2013 (CMR)*, p.2. Available online at <https://www.iom.int/files/live/sites/iom/files/Country/docs/CMReport-Philippines-2013.pdf>, accessed 14 September 2016.

of Philippine nationalism's long revolution of articulating and enacting a Philippine national consciousness in the language of a complex transnationality.

The seven essays in the volume, written from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s, are presented in the Introduction as "documents of the migration revolution" (8), and are cohesively framed as reflections on the class dialectic between Philippine nationhood and migrant subjectivity. Taken together, they put forth the argument that Philippine labor migration since the 1960s has shifted the national imaginary of Filipinoness from a bipolar model premised on the country's relationship to the United States to a "reserialized" framing that recasts the Philippines' mobile presence in the world against "a wider consociation of nations, a plurality that is now densely packed in the word 'abroad'" (117). In Chapters 1 and 2—historical accounts of Manilamen on nineteenth-century whaling ships, and traditional forms of migrant labor—Aguilar contends that the "new mythology of global Filipinoness" (20) emerging from the contemporary global dispersal of overseas workers traces its roots to a deeper history of colonial subjects from Las Islas Filipinas traveling beyond the colony to work as laborers, servants, and seafarers—a movement that preceded yet was excluded by the *ilustrado*-led campaign for independence from Spain. Aguilar maps an expanded geography of Philippine globality beyond the imperialistic relationship with the United States, and through the enduring hierarchies of social class renegotiated by migrant Filipinos in and outside the homeland, convincingly arguing for the "ineluctable relationship between overseas migration and nationhood" in the Philippine context (22).

Four major themes in the volume expound on the character and consequences of this fundamental dialectic. The first is the notion of political emotions of shame and pride in the face of migrant realities both exceptional (the 1995 execution of domestic worker Flor Contemplacion in Singapore) and quotidian (the overseas [dis]identification of elite and white-collar Filipino migrants with

their working-class compatriots). The second focuses on migrant subjectivities and the question of migrants' individual agency vis-à-vis tight-knit social and kin relations. The third theme of transnation and cosmopolitanism argues for a cultural politics that intertwines rather than divides the discourses of locality and globality, nationalist belonging and cosmopolitan fluency. Finally, the question of citizenship transposes these concerns onto the legal-political context of the state, and the contrasting ways in which Filipino temporary labor migrants in Asia enact their transnational belongingness vis-à-vis their immigrant counterparts in the United States.

Among the many merits of this anthology of landmark essays is its multi-scalar, multi-sited, multi-perspectival, and multi-temporal approach to the core question of nationhood and migration, making full use of a varied reservoir of data from historical archives to statistical surveys, personal testimonies, and observations to broad surveys of industrial sectors. Aguilar likewise succeeds in animating his intellectual analysis with “an inescapable reflexivity” (8) borne of his personal experience of migrant privilege as a Filipino academic in Singapore studying and interacting with other Filipinos from different social groups, occupations, and host countries. That his essays on transnational shame and the secular pilgrimage of migrant Filipinos (Chapters 3 and 4 in the volume) are among the most influential and vital examples of his scholarship reflect the necessity of this intellectual, and indeed ethical, reckoning in any serious study of migration and nationhood.

Aguilar's sensitivity to the historical specificities of his milieu—late twentieth-century globalizing Asia—lends urgency and depth to his theory of Philippine nationhood as migration-driven seriality, enabling him to thoughtfully engage with Benedict Anderson, Arjun Appadurai, and other major thinkers of cultural globalization and nationalism from the paradoxes of the Philippine experience. His focus on the perspectives and histories of working-class Filipino migrants serves as an important intervention into otherwise elitist

depictions of cosmopolitanism and mobility, challenging readers to recognize the extent to which the nation's ongoing history in the world—and its sociocultural, political, economic, and imaginal borders—are inscribed and negotiated not by its elites, but its millions of intrepid, and ordinary, workers.

Notwithstanding Aguilar's consistently nuanced reading, and copious references to the empirical research of feminist scholars of migration, *Migration Revolution* is marked by the curious omission of a deeper theoretical engagement with gender, and the ways in which this intertwines with the other key categories of belongingness and difference to constitute the subjective dialectics of shame. This omission seems to be a major oversight: Philippine labor migration has always unfolded along the structural lines of traditionally gendered forms of labor such as domestic work, seafaring, and construction, as Aguilar himself so ably tracks in Chapter 2. Further, there is a distinctly feminine and/or masculine character to the moralistic discourses of sacrifice, shame/pride, and heroism, which are bound up in individual-social narratives of gendered parental duty and sexual morality. It is difficult to conceive of the class frictions encapsulated in *hiya*, for instance, without delving into the gendered notions of *puri* (feminine sexual purity) and sexual shame. The complex intertwining of race, class, and gender unavoidably informs Filipino migrant subjectivities in a range of occupations and situations: to cite an example, Filipina singers in five-star hotels are enjoined to look sexually attractive yet sophisticated and respectable (often shown in “appropriate” skirt length and cleavage exposure) to avoid the *hiya* of being mistaken for a (lower-classed) domestic worker or nightclub entertainer. The otherwise illuminating first chapter on nineteenth-century Manila seafarers analyzes a clearly gendered occupation without considering how the nascent emergence of Filipino cosmopolitanism in this episode is at once the formation of a globally situated Filipino masculinity.

It is useful in this regard to link Aguilar's insights into race and class with the work of scholars such as Steven McKay,<sup>3</sup> who shows how Filipino seafarers' racialized performances of competence and responsibility at the global workplace are inextricably tied to locally articulated notions of manhood and masculine shame. *Migration Revolution* succeeds in demonstrating that being Filipino is a complex individual and collective project of becoming global, and the diachronic approach of Aguilar's exemplary work could only be further enriched by a more expansively intersectional analysis that would acknowledge how being Filipino—negotiating Philippine subjectivity within the context of globalized and racialized class relations—is already and always a matter of “doing” one's gendered Filipino and/or Filipina identity.

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<sup>3</sup> Steven C. McKay, “Filipino Seamen: Constructing Masculinities in an Ethnic Labour Niche,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33, no. 4 (2007): 617–33; Steven McKay and Don Eliseo Lucero-Prisno III, “Masculinities Afloat: Filipino Seafarers and the Situational Performance of Manhood at Sea, in Port, and at Home,” in *Men and Masculinities in Southeast Asia*, ed. M. Ford and L. Leons (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2012), 20–37.