FILIPINOS in GLOBAL MIGRATIONS:

AT HOME IN THE WORLD?

Edited by

FILOMENO V. AGUILAR, JR.
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Preface

THE LABOR MIGRATION of Filipinos since the 1970s coincided with a particular moment when international migration became truly global. Today their presence in over a hundred countries attests to the transformation of Filipino migrants into global workers.

The whys and wherefores of contemporary Filipino migrations have fascinated academics, resulting in a rich literature, some of which are not readily available in the country. Bringing together in this volume the writings by non-Filipino scholars or by those based outside the Philippines is also a homecoming of sorts which calls for a warm welcome: maligayang pagbalik! The Philippine Migration Research Network (PMRN), which supported this initiative, is pleased to see the project come to a successful completion. Together with PMRN, I would like to commend Filomeno V. Aguilar, Jr. for his vision and dedication in bringing home this collection of thoughtful articles.

Published between 1986 and 2000, many articles in this volume endeavor to wed data with theory (and occasionally, data, theory and politics), thereby rendering an interpretive frame to the different facets of Filipino migrations. Although these articles were not specifically written to examine whether Filipinos are at home in the world, in different ways they provide some insights to the question—or at the least, invite further debates and questions.

In this time of intense globalization, it is quite easy to lose sight of the fact that migrants are actors, possessing agency to act upon opportunities and constraints around them. Max Frisch’s comment decades ago on the unintended consequence of the guest worker policy in Europe—“we called for workers and got human beings”—holds true in the continuing saga of labor migration in Asia. As we are witnessing in the region, international migration is more than the sum of formidable structural forces and processes. In particular, the (re)discovery of migrants’ humanity has unraveled the human and social costs of migration on the one hand, and its possibilities for transformations on the other. Both sides are part of the promises and perils of migration.
Our experiences as a country of origin have taught us, among others, that when we deploy overseas workers, we send out human beings, with all their potentials and vulnerabilities. Responding to the problems encountered by migrant workers and their families has prompted our institutions to reorient their ways of approaching these challenges. Receiving countries in the region also have to reckon with human beings, despite their intention to bring in migrant workers only. Limiting migrants' rights has not kept migrants from expressing their humanity. Despite the conditions they find themselves in, or perhaps because of such conditions, they seek out other migrants, they build communities or alternative institutions, and some become settlers. Not a few resort to or are tricked into unauthorized channels, including traffickers, to get around migration regulations.

Through individual initiative or with the support provided by personal networks, government agencies or non-government organizations, Filipino migrants chip off the blocks of prejudice and discrimination to build a home wherever they are. In their search for work in the global market, Filipinos have reconfigured the home, with relationships (especially family ties, or family-like ties where there are none) rather than geography as the defining element of what the home and being at home mean. In the face of more migration in the future, perhaps we should also explore the other side of the question: how can the world be a welcoming and safer home for Filipinos and other migrants? That would be an interesting sequel to this volume and a change that is a long time coming for people on the move.

Maruja M.B. Asis
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Executive Committee and
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