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Asia Pacific:

PERSPECTIVES

an electronic journal

Volume VII · Number 1

15 July · 2007

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Asia Pacific: Perspectives is a peer-reviewed journal published at least once a year, usually in April/May. It welcomes submissions from all fields of the social sciences and the humanities with relevance to the Asia Pacific region.* In keeping with the Jesuit traditions of the University of San Francisco, *Asia Pacific: Perspectives* commits itself to the highest standards of learning and scholarship.

Our task is to inform public opinion by a broad hospitality to divergent views and ideas that promote cross-cultural understanding, tolerance, and the dissemination of knowledge unreservedly. Papers adopting a comparative, interdisciplinary approach will be especially welcome. **Graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit their work for consideration.**

* 'Asia Pacific region' as used here includes East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Oceania, and the Russian Far East.

A Futuristic Look into the Filipino Diaspora: Trends, Issues, and Implications

by Soledad Rica R. Llorente, Ed.D.

Abstract

The Filipinos overseas...Where are they? Why do they go? What is their future outlook? There are currently eight million Filipinos working and living in almost all countries of the world save one. They constitute a real diaspora, a people displaced, dislocated and dispersed. This article addresses those critical questions by investigating this particular phenomenon and the economic, cultural and political forces propelling it. The study analyzes the serious social and ethical challenges encountered by Filipino workers overseas, and their families back home. It also examines the policy implications for the Philippines and host countries such as the United States. By presenting current demographic data such as age, gender, occupation and regional concentration not only in the U.S but also in other countries, the study attempts to define future trends in terms of the phenomenon's direction and strength. The research framework of the study is critical hermeneutics, which is interpretive and anthropological, using the theories of both Western and Filipino philosophers, political scientists and anthropologists. This article aims to provide deeper understanding and raise the consciousness of communities regarding the Filipino diaspora especially in the United States.

"The irony is that, although longing for home, Filipinos now belong to the world."

Epifanio San Juan, Jr., 1998

Indeed the Filipinos overseas now constitute a diaspora, a critical mass of people, dispersed, displaced and dislocated throughout the world. This phenomenon raises critical questions. Will this diaspora continue? What are some of the forces propelling it? What are its directions and where does it get its strength? What is the profile of the contemporary Filipino immigrant? How does the future look for Filipinos overseas? For their families back home? For the Filipinos in the United States? This study aims to shed some light and some understanding to these issues.

Trends and Patterns

They go as permanent immigrants, temporary contract workers, and overstaying visitors. They are viewed as the new overseas class of the Philippines, its biggest export, described as the "forerunner of tomorrow's economy, supplying all types of labor to the global village" (Diamond, 2002). Approximately eight million Filipinos are overseas, representing almost ten percent of the nation's population. Almost a million leave the country annually to work abroad. "They nurse the sick in California, drive fuel trucks in Iraq, sail cargo ships through the Panama Canal and navigate cruise ships through the Gulf of Alaska. They pour sake for Japanese salarymen and raise the children of Saudi businessmen" (Paddock, 2006). They are propelled to go abroad by various economic, political, and global forces; but most of all,

they are driven by the dream to provide financially for their families and loved ones.

In the chart and table below, it is significant to note that among Filipinos abroad, there are more temporary contract workers than permanent immigrants, and there is a considerable number of overstaying, undocumented ones, often categorized by other countries as "irregulars."

In 2003 there were 8.09 million Filipinos overseas, or 10 percent of the 2003 Philippine population of 81 million.

Filipinos Overseas by Type (millions of people)

Type	Number
Temporary workers	3.6
Permanent	3.19
Undocumented	1.3
TOTAL	8.09

Source: Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2004

Typically labor migrants go to comparatively rich countries, preferably ones where they have friends or relatives and whose language they speak or whose religion and culture they share. The contemporary trend and pattern of international migration for Filipino workers are clear and gathering momentum. Five migration streams stand out. The first goes to North America specifically the United States and Canada. A second flow is towards the oil-rich Middle East countries such Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and even Israel. Another stream goes to rich Asian neighbors like Hong Kong, Japan, Taiwan and Singapore. Another stream of migration goes to western European countries such as Italy, Germany, Spain, and England. A fifth flow goes to various parts of Africa such as Morocco, Tunisia and even Cape Verde. According to Philippine Labor Secretary Patricia Santo Tomas (2005), they are in all countries of the world, save one, North Korea. Of the top twelve destination countries for Filipino migrants in 2003, the United States is first and England is twelfth (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2005).

TOP FIVE DESTINATION COUNTRIES OF FILIPINO TEMPORARY WORKERS, 2003

Country	Number
Saudi Arabia	948,329
Japan	197,268
Hong Kong	185,500
United Arab Emirates	172,755
Taiwan	151,824

TOP FIVE DESTINATION COUNTRIES OF FILIPINO PERMANENT WORKERS, 2003

Country	Number
United States	1,979,408
Canada	392,120
Australia	209,017
Japan	77,310
United Kingdom	46,234

While the United States may be the most popular permanent destination, as noted above the top destination country for temporary work for Filipinos is Saudi Arabia with its booming economy demanding workers for its vast oil fields, refineries and construction projects. Almost a million Filipinos, 3,000 daily, leave the country with work contracts, staying away for years, returning for short visits and coming back, if at all, only to retire.

Filipinos in the US

The United States remains the top destination for Filipinos to settle permanently. Around 40,000 of them get admitted for emigrant status in the U.S. annually. If they do not qualify for residency status, there is no preventing them from turning into irregular migrants. There are currently approximately two million Filipinos in the U.S., half a million of them undocumented according to the American Community Survey (2004) and the Commission of Filipinos Overseas (2004). Characterized principally as a search for economic opportunity, the immigration of Filipinos to the United States is intimately related to the political links between both countries. According to the U.S. census, there was an increase of Filipino Americans of 137% from 1980 to 1990 and a 32% increase from 1990 to 2000. Filipino communities are concentrated mostly on the West coast, the East coast and Hawaii, as shown in the table below.

Filipinos in the US, 2004

	US Census 2000	Am. Com. Survey 2004
California	920,000	1,100,000
Hawaii	176,780	188,759
New Jersey	88,408	92,000
New York	86,722	99,000
Washington	65,057	67,330
Florida	54,332	62,000
Virginia	48,016	50,000
Nevada	40,427	58,647
Arizona	16,205	20,200
Alaska	12,488	13,000
TOTAL	1,508,435	1,750,936

Source: American Community Survey, 2004; U.S. Census, 2000

Although Filipino migration to the United States has had a long history, it gained critical momentum in the last 100 years with the recruitment of Filipinos to farm the sugar plantations of Hawaii and the fields of California. Filipino migration began like a trickle with the first fifteen immigrants arriving in Oahu in 1906 and gradually grew like a series of exponentially increasing waves through the twentieth century. Today, there are more than 188,000 first, second and third generation Filipinos in Hawaii alone, representing almost 15% of the state's population (American Community Survey, U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). The Filipino experience in Hawaii is one of the most storied in Philippine migration. It reflects the struggles and legacies of early Filipino farm laborers to their rise in the political arena of the host state and country. The table below shows the trend of Filipino immigration to Hawaii.

Filipino Americans contribute to the diversity of America in demographic, economic and cultural terms. Although far from being homogeneous, census data shows that Filipinos in the country are mostly employed in the professional and

Filipino Immigrants to Hawaii, 1906-2004

YEAR	NUMBER
1906	15
1910	2,361
1950	61,062
1990	168,682
2000	176,780
2004	188,759

Source: Historical Statistics of Hawaii, by Robert C. Schmitt (University Press of Hawaii, 1977); 1980 Census of Population: general population characteristics - Hawaii (U.S. Census Bureau, 1982); 2000 U.S. Census of Population; 2004 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004)

skilled services and are highly educated with an average family income and individual per capita income higher than the national average. The tables below show the profile of Filipinos in the United States as of 2004.

Profile of Filipinos in the U.S. - 2004

	Filipinos in U.S.	Total U.S. Population
Gender		
Male	44.9%	48.9%
Female	55.1%	51.1%
Educational Attainment		
High School grad.	90.8%	83.9%
Bachelor's degree	47.9%	27%
Professional		
Masters, Doctorate	8.2%	9.9%
Income		
Median family income	\$72,165	\$53,672
Ind. Per capita income	\$25,534	\$24,020
Employment	68.8%	65.9%
Average Family size	3.68	3.18

Filipinos in the U.S. by Occupation - 2004

Occupation	Filipinos in U.S.	Total U.S. Population
Management	39.5%	34.0%
Education Sector	31.3%	20.4%
Sales & Office	28.0%	26.0%
Services, Health care	18.0%	16.0%
Transportation	10.0%	13.0%
Construction	4.0%	10.0%
Farming, Fishing	0.5%	1.0%
TOTAL	100%	100%

Source: American Community Survey, 2004, U.S. Census Bureau

A significant feature of the Filipino demographic data in the U.S. is the relatively young median age, reported by the U.S. Census bureau as 37.8. This means that half of Filipinos in the U.S. are younger than 40 years and half are older. The implication is that the biggest proportion of Filipinos in the U.S. consists of robust vibrant individuals, and further suggests that those emigrating from the Philippines to the United States are young educated professionals: see table below showing age distribution of Filipinos in the United States.

Filipinos in the U.S. by Age - 2003 (Median Age = 37.8)

AGE	PERCENT
Under 5 years	5.20%
5 to 17 years	16.10%
18 to 24 years	8.70%
25 to 34 years	14.70%
35 to 44 years	18.30%
45 to 54 years	16%
55 to 64 years	11.60%
65 to 74 years	5.70%
75+ years	3.70%

Source: American Community Survey, 2004, U.S. Census Bureau, 2004

Emerging Patterns

Various patterns observed over the years have emerged, especially shaping the Philippine international labor migration experience. Stella Go (2002) infers several patterns from data. One is the volume of Filipinos leaving the country to work temporarily overseas throughout the years is decidedly overwhelming in comparison to the volume of people leaving the country to reside permanently abroad. Another is the predominance of the Middle East as a work destination. Furthermore, in the seventies and early eighties the emergence of Asia, particularly its newly industrializing economies, emerged as an increasingly important alternative destination for Filipino labor in the mid-eighties and nineties. According to Go (2002), there is a shift occurring from the preponderance of workers in production, transport, construction, and related industries in the seventies and mid-eighties to an increasing proportion of service workers, particularly domestic helpers in the mid-eighties and nineties. The most significant pattern emerging is that the male-dominated labor migration stream in the seventies has given way to an increasing feminization of these streams in the mid-eighties and the nineties.

The profile of overseas Filipino workers is changing. Whereas the earlier wave of Filipino workers, mainly to the Persian Gulf, consisted predominantly of male construction workers, the overseas Filipino working population has recently become increasingly female. Women now comprise about 55% of the total number of overseas Filipino workers. In spite of the fact that overseas contract work comprises many kinds of labor, the current symbol of overseas workers

on the national consciousness of the Philippines is that of the domestic helper (Tadiar 1997). This can perhaps be attributed to the sensational media stories of Filipina nannies and domestic workers experiencing abuse, exploitation, and death abroad.

Filipino women have been described as the quintessential service workers of globalization by Nigel Harris (1995) who points out that, “Filipinas are everywhere, a genuine labor force – maids in Hong Kong and Singapore, workers on Japanese farms, sales clerks in the duty-free shops of Bahrain, secretaries, cleaners and janitors in most of the world’s cities from London to Sao Paulo.”

Remittances

The underlying motivation for Filipinos to live and work abroad is to financially support their families in the Philippines. They provide donations and infuse capital to the country through remittances, investments, and other forms of contributions. The remittances of overseas Filipino workers continue to be of ever-increasing importance to the Philippine economy. They play a crucial role in propping up the Philippine economy through the money they send to their families back home. The political imagination has transformed the millions of migrant Filipino workers abroad by officially recognizing them as modern-day heroes. Recently, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo described them as “the backbone of the new global workforce” (2006). The table below illustrates the dramatic increase in remittances of overseas Filipino workers back to the country in over one decade.

Remittances of Overseas Filipino Workers 1990-2005 (US\$billions)

Year	Remittance
1990	1.2
1992	2.2
1994	2.9
1996	4.3
2000	6.8
2003	7.7
2004	8.5

Source: Foreign Exchange Department, Central Bank of the Philippines, 2005

Economic benefits are the biggest attraction and the most tangible result of overseas employment. A typical overseas worker sends no less than 40% of his or her earnings back home on a monthly basis. Filipino professor Vicente Rafael (2000) observes that “remittances by overseas Filipinos to their families can have a radical effect on people’s lives – building houses in depressed rural villages, paying off medical bills, sending little brothers, sisters and cousins to school.” Over the years, a significant proportion of Filipino families have relied on foreign remittances as a main source of income. In 1997, 6.2% of Filipino families derived their main source of income from remittances. This translates to a

total of 881,263 families who receive income from overseas. According to Parreñas (2001), the average migrant worker supports five people at home, and one out of every five Filipinos directly depends on migrant workers' earnings.

Closer analysis of the data in 2004 reveals that more than half of remittances come from Filipinos in the United States. The chart below indicates that, 56% of the total \$8.5 billion sent to the Philippines that year, approximately \$4.76 billion originated from the United States. Filipinos in Saudi Arabia, Italy, Hong Kong and Japan also heavily remitted back to the country.

True, the money they earn trickles into towns and villages, helping build houses, open restaurants and send children to school. But the absence of so many industrious and skilled people — mothers and fathers, engineers and entrepreneurs — also exacts a heavy toll. The worth of it all to individual families is, however, only one part of a cost-benefit analysis of Philippine labor migration. Writer Barbara Posadas (1999) questions whether the financial benefits can adequately compensate for the human and social costs of overseas migration.

Challenges and Opportunities

Economic Opportunities

Filipino workers, their families and the government live in a vortex of tremendous economic opportunities, which exacts a very high social cost. Philippine Labor Secretary Patricia Santo Tomas (2001) reports there are bright prospects for overseas employment with the increasing demand for information technology (IT) and health care professionals. For instance, the United States, Canada, Australia, Germany, Italy, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore are attracting professionals in the IT sector. Japan is trying to attract nurses of Filipino-Japanese ancestry to undergo intensive professional and language training. Austria, the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands, Canada and Germany are also increasingly hiring Filipino nurses. Moreover, the Philippines continues to be the major supplier of seafarers in the world.

Participating in this research project, Philippine Labor Attaché Helen D. Custodio (2003), offered her forecast for the next five or ten years for Filipinos working overseas:

There will a growing market for contract workers in the future. In the US there will be an increase in the need for nurses, teachers, and health care service providers because of the aging populations. There is nothing that shows the diaspora is going to be reversed, but the feeling continues that the Philippine government should put a lot more effort in generating employment in the country in order to reduce incentives for workers to seek employment overseas.

While there is little the Philippines' government can do to affect the global situation, it does have the ability to put a lot more effort in the regulation of domestic industry so that the rights of the workers are protected.

Social Costs

There is a substantial amount of human suffering and sacrifice borne by those forced to live diasporic lives. The Filipino contract workers, unable to bring their families, endure pangs of separation, especially mothers and fathers from their children, and the culture shock of living in a foreign land. Not all families survive these protracted absences unscathed. Philippine Labor Attaché Helen Custodio records a litany of dire social consequences.

There is a very human dimension. In the Philippines there is an epidemic of broken families, high drop out rate from school of the children and unwanted pregnancies, plus those who get into drugs, bad company, and those who fall into a life of crime. Overseas, you would not believe some of the cases we have like workers who fall sick, abandoned by employers or workers who suffer physical abuse. The heartbreaking cases are found mostly in the Middle East and Asia. There is emotional abuse, there is exploitation in the form of sexual harassment, maltreatment, rape, imprisonment, sometimes death. Both the worker and their families suffer. There's loneliness to deal with, children suffer due to the absence of parents, sometimes both parents are not home.

Across the Philippines today grandparents often assume the responsibility to raise children. "Now children can buy a lot of computer games, but they don't have a mother or father, or both," Santo Tomas said. The Philippines has grown so dependent on remittances that the thought of doing without them is frightening. "Money from abroad is the only thing that keeps the economy in motion," said Ding Lichauco (2004), former head of the country's economic planning office. A negative effect from this is taking place. A culture of dependency by recipient families on dollars from abroad is insidiously developing, replacing the motivation or drive to be self-sufficient. An entire generation of children and relatives just wait for the mail or the text message on the cell phone that once again there is money in the bank.

Ethical Choices

Despite the knowledge in the Philippines of the hardships facing migrant workers, one out of every ten Filipinos still wants to seek employment outside the country. Overseas Filipino workers struggle with difficult ethical dilemmas vis-à-vis economic imperatives. The pervasive poverty and inequality that plagues the Philippines make it clear why so many Filipinos feel compelled to leave their homes for the uncertainties and dangers of working abroad as a migrant laborer. It is a national tragedy, claims Okamura (1998) for them to depart in such great numbers and at such great distances from families to perform jobs that others refuse to do.

An anxiety emerges from a moral concern for the integrity of the Filipino people, and an economic concern for the progress of the country. Filipina professor Neferti Tadiar (1997) expresses this anxiety:

Exporting human labor risks our homes, the very core of our Filipino society. It also threatens the fabric of

our labor force, draining it of its brains and brawn, elements vital to our progress. Filipino overseas workers are not dregs of our society...Pushed to leave instead of encouraged to stay by the government, this means the downgrading of our work force at home, lessening our own capability to perform competitively with other countries and pauperizing ourselves of our own people and of their physical, intellectual and spiritual contributions.

The *Economist* (2001) reports "about half of the Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong are mothers earning money to send their children to school back home. The other half tend to be eldest sisters working to feed younger siblings. All are their families' primary breadwinners." Their keenest pain, according to the article, is leaving their children and husbands behind for years, or for good, in order to provide for them. These families often break apart due to their separation. It is hard, for instance, to find married overseas workers whose spouses at home have not taken another partner, or even had children with others. Arthur Sodusta Jr., Philippine Labor Attaché to the U.S. (2003), corroborates the report with a personal eyewitness account.

I have been posted in Saudi Arabia for two years and witnessed first hand the ethical problems. I must tell you that the moral and ethical issues are severe. Our men and women leave their spouses behind and because of the need for companionship, find other partners, cohabit and bear children outside marriage. The real marriages do not survive. And you know, we do not have divorce in the Philippines. But what has troubled me is the fact that many of the children born out of the illicit unions are abandoned overseas.

In the United States according to Sodusta, the most pervasive ethical dilemma for Filipinos concerns their desire to stay and work despite not having proper documents or permits. He adds that many among the half million Filipinos categorized as "irregulars" by the American government resort to sham marriages with American citizens in order to obtain the precious "green card."

Philippine Political Policy

Overseas migration for Filipinos – whether permanent or temporary – is shaped by and is shaping national policy. For the Philippines, migrant labor has grown from being a stop-gap measure to being an official policy of the nation. Filipino migrant workers have become the Philippines' largest sources of foreign exchange. In its development policy (2001-2004) under the Arroyo administration, the government now explicitly recognizes overseas employment as a "legitimate option for the country's work force, including the preference for overseas employment." The government actively explores and develops "better employment opportunities and modes of engagement in overseas labor markets." Thus, from managing the flow, government now aggressively promotes international labor migration as a growth strategy, especially of the higher skilled, knowledge-based workers (Go, 2002).

For the Filipino workers, global forces have rendered the

rest of the world as the new arena in which to venture and realize their dreams. With modern communications and transportation technologies, they can go farther, faster and cheaper as the world becomes a global village. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Philippines lost its competitive advantage in the international economic sphere, and today its Asian neighbors including Thailand, Indonesia and Malaysia have passed it by in terms of economic development (NEDA, 1998). Increasing the skills and capabilities of the Filipino labor force and making them internationally competitive is another area of political attention. The government reports that with globalization and increasing trade liberalization, the demand for a more skill-intensive and technology-literate workforce to produce high quality goods in the global market will become increasingly greater for more developed economies with a scarcity of labor (Intal, 1997). The Philippine government exhorts its people to seize the opportunity so that professionals and higher skilled workers can participate more actively in the global market.

Implications and Outlook

It is critical to approach overseas migration as a multi-dimensional and multi-level phenomenon. The trends and patterns offered by data, the economic disparity between the industrialized nations and third world countries including the Philippines, the pervasive unemployment and underemployment in the country, the official policy of the government to promote overseas work and the deeply embedded cultural value of Filipinos to support their families and loved ones over and above their personal interests suggest important implications in the outlook for the future. The most significant implication is that the Filipino diaspora will continue to accelerate into the 21st century. And since Filipinos maintain their ties and connections to their families in the homeland, transnational lifestyles, which is the back and forth flow of people, ideas, material resources and projects, will become the rule in the near future. The skills composition of new immigrants from the Philippines may also shift due to the demand for workers in the Information Technology sector of the industrialized world. The aging American and Japanese populations will, however, continue to need health, medical and care workers, which the Philippines can continue to supply.

The social impact of this phenomenon affects the shape and the strengths and weaknesses of Filipino families consisting of children and spouses left behind for years or for good. It is imperative for individual Filipino workers and their families to reflect on the short, medium and long-term impact of the choice to live and work abroad. It is crucial for the government to continuously adapt its policies to the changing environment and respond not only to the economic but social needs of its people.

For purposes of improving and protecting the welfare of its workforce abroad, the government has entered into bilateral agreements with some countries. Many more countries need to be covered. In this vein, other sectors of society such as non-government agencies play an important role in advo-

cating for the rights of overseas workers, especially women. The role of religion remains particularly important. Whether Catholic, Christian or Muslim, the church remains in a strong position to direct the moral compass in addressing the unique ethical dilemmas faced by migrant workers overseas and the families left behind.

For Filipinos in the United States who are the largest block of overseas Filipinos, they have unique issues and implications to examine. As the second and third generations of Filipino-Americans begin to take over from the first, there are serious generation gaps, questions of assimilation or cultural conservation, of going back to the roots or defining new identities that buffet the community.

In the global arena, new economic models are developing. Outsourcing to countries like India, China and the Philippines provide a new way for countries to retrain and retain their manpower and possibly to reverse the migration flow. This study indicates that there are many directions to take and important decisions to make.

Reflections

Clearly, more needs to be done in interpreting contemporary Philippine labor migration across the globe. Numerous voices from the West and from the Philippines raise the significance of its causes and consequences. It has been noted that despite their large numbers and wide dispersal, there is little discussion, analysis and international debate on the status of Filipino migrants, especially temporary workers. It is striking how invisible the work of Filipinos in the global marketplace remains, and how little it is discussed in the First World. There is a need to make visible the invisible Filipino overseas worker.

This paper began with Epifanio San Juan Jr's 1998 quote and profound insight that Filipinos, although longing for home, now belong to the whole world. This paper ends with his admonition that the Filipino diaspora demands a new language and symbolism, a need for a "cognitive mapping" of the geometry and velocity of the movement across national boundaries. This study follows that call and admonition.

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