

Philippine migration and the political economy of “hope” |

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Abstract

State promoted Philippine labour export has become taken-for-granted by Filipino nationals and indeed, a broad sweep of labour import countries seeking to fill domestic labour market shortages with reliable labour at the lowest wage rates tolerated within applicable regulatory frameworks. Despite state oversight, not all migrants exiting the country hold valid labour contracts and have processed through the requisite departure protocols which include pre-departure seminars. While temporary migrant workers are more vulnerable to ‘super exploitation’ and abuse, visa holding migrants across all skill sets accept employment with lower wages than equivalently qualified locals in destination countries thereby adding more value for their employers. Such value disparities involving deskilling, reskilling, and upskilling ensure capital profitability and perpetuate historically produced forms of unequal exchange along the Philippine-Canada migration corridor. This paper explores transnational migration and integration dynamics with a particular emphasis upon public and private institutions concerned with processing (and disciplining) migrants. Falsely optimistic projections pervade recruitment presentations offered in the Philippines, while worst case scenarios are normalized in pre-departure seminars. Migrants remain hopeful. What alternatives do migrants have given their commitment to migration and the promise of better life that pervades the cultural normalization of migration? How might it be otherwise?

Biography

Pauline Gardiner Barber, a Social Anthropologist, is Professor Emerita at Dalhousie University with a long-standing interest in the anthropology of labour, gender and development, and the social reproduction of Philippine migration. Her current SSHRC funded project “Fast food, slow migrations: Canada’s temporary foreign workers at home in the Philippines”, is a collaborative project with Catherine Bryan and two Philippine researchers. This transnational project tracks the mutually influential mobilities of capital and labour along the Philippine-Canada migration corridor and follows from previous SSHRC funded research on the transnational consequences of Canada’s “just-in-time” immigration restructuring. Co-authored books include: *Migration, Temporality, and Capitalism: Entangled Mobilities across Global Spaces*; *Mobility and Cosmopolitanism: Complicating the Interaction between Aspiration and Practice*; *Migration in the 21st Century: Political Economy and Ethnography*; *Class, Contention and a World in Motion*. Recent articles appear in *Dialectical Anthropology*, *International Migration*, and the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.