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Migrants for Export

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Published by University of Minnesota Press

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Migrants for Export: How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.

Project MUSE. Web. 4 Mar. 2016<http://muse.jhu.edu/>.



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Introduction

Neoliberalism and the Philippine Labor Brokerage State

Not only am I the head of state responsible for a nation of 80 million people. I'm also the CEO of a global Philippine enterprise of 8 million Filipinos who live and work abroad and generate billions of dollars a year in revenue for our country. — President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, May 2003

A “Global Enterprise” of Labor

During a state visit to the United States in 2003, Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo aggressively encouraged U.S. businesspeople to hire Philippine workers to fill their employment needs in the territorial United States and beyond. When American colonizers encountered Filipinos in 1898, they considered them a backward and savage lot who were, nevertheless, sufficiently educable. The United States proceeded to violently conquer the Filipino people and then, with a policy of “benevolent assimilation,” schooled them into being proper colonial subjects who could labor for the nascent empire. Arroyo assures her audience that American colonial education adequately served its purpose and even exceeded it.¹

Today, Arroyo suggests, the Filipino is a thoroughly modern and civilized global worker who can labor anywhere and under any set of circumstances for American as well as other employers. The president insists that Philippine workers can be relied upon to labor for the contemporary U.S. empire, pledging that Philippine workers will “play a role in helping rebuild the land for the people of Iraq.” No

matter how difficult or dangerous a place of employment may be, Filipinos and Filipinas are ever-willing workers. Employers can even be spared the expense of training workers because it is a task done in the Philippines, one that the Philippine government has “worked hard to support.” Though not stated explicitly by the president, her speech does suggest that employers can save on labor costs because Philippine workers are a temporary workforce ostensibly less able or willing to demand wage increases or better benefits over time. In short, the promise of the Philippine worker is not merely the promise of a worker of good quality, but ultimately one who is cheap.

According to Arroyo, she is not merely president but also the “CEO” of a profitable “global enterprise” that generates revenues by successfully assembling together and exporting a much sought-after commodity worldwide: “highly skilled, well-educated, English-speaking” as well as “productive” and “efficient” workers. By calling herself a “CEO” Arroyo represents herself not as a head of state but as an entrepreneur, the ideal neoliberal subject, who rationally maximizes her country’s competitive advantage in the global market. I suggest that the Philippines, especially when it comes to migrants, is a labor brokerage state.

Labor brokerage is a neoliberal strategy that is comprised of institutional and discursive practices through which the Philippine state mobilizes its citizens and sends them abroad to work for employers throughout the world while generating a “profit” from the remittances that migrants send back to their families and loved ones remaining in the Philippines. The Philippine state negotiates with labor-receiving states to formalize outflows of migrant workers and thereby enables employers around the globe to avail themselves of temporary workers who can be summoned to work for finite periods of time and then returned to their homeland at the conclusion of their employment contracts. As Antonio Tujan of IBON (a nonprofit research-education-information development institution), a longtime critic of the government’s labor export program, puts it, the Philippine state engages in nothing more than “legal human trafficking.”²

**Able Minds
Able Hands
To Foreign Lands**



The Filipino Worker

Figure 1. Brochure produced by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration.

If, as many scholars have argued, global capital demands “flexible” labor, Philippine migrants are uniquely “flexible” as short-term, contractual, and incredibly mobile workers. Employers of Philippine workers need not “race to the bottom” by relocating to the Philippines but can actually stay in place as Philippine workers can be conveyed directly to them. The Philippines offers a reserve army of labor to be deployed for capital across the planet.

The Philippine state, in fact, distinguishes itself in its capacity to facilitate the out-migration of its population to destinations spanning the planet. It is undeniably the world’s premier “global enterprise” of labor as the Philippine migrant worker has become practically ubiquitous around the globe. The worldwide distribution of Philippine migrants is staggering and perhaps unmatched by any other labor-sending country.³ According to the most recent (2008) statistics from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) one of the key institutions in the Philippine government’s transnational migration apparatus, 1,236,013 Filipino and Filipina workers were deployed in some 200 countries and territories around the globe. These workers joined the millions of Philippine migrants already employed overseas to total an estimated 8,233,172.⁴ With a population of over 80 million people, that means that nearly 10 percent of the Philippine population is working abroad.

Among newly deployed migrants, the top occupations in which Philippine migrants are employed are the following (in order): household service workers; waiters, cleaners, and related workers; charworkers, cleaners, and related workers; nurses, professional; caregivers and caretakers; laborers/helpers, general; plumbers and pipe fitters; electrical wiremen; welders and flame-cutters; building caretakers.⁵ Both men and women leave the country although in the past decade women’s out-migration has outpaced the out-migration of men. However, statistics collected from April to September 2008 indicate that 51.6 percent of migrants were men while 48.4 percent were women. One in four migrants were between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine, and one-third were unskilled.⁶

Philippine migrants’ global mobility occurs in the face of increasing immigration restrictiveness around the world. Many countries

are strengthening their borders, especially against those hoping to immigrate and settle with their families.⁷ In spite of this trend, out-migration from the Philippines continues to increase. The Philippine state has been central to the globalization of Filipina and Filipino workers. While people from the Philippines actively seek out opportunities to live and work overseas for a variety of reasons, ultimately the countries they imagine as possible sites for temporary sojourns as well as the jobs they apply for are determined in large part by the Philippine state's labor brokerage strategy.⁸

President Arroyo, for example, played a vital role in securing new jobs for Philippine workers in the Middle East to support U.S. military operations. After meeting U.S. businessmen, she met U.S. government officials to discuss the two countries' shared interests in the global "war on terror" and, it can be assumed, transfers of Philippine labor, for not long after her brief stint in the United States, Iraq was added to the ever-growing list of Philippine migrants' countries of destination. Moreover, according to a report by the POEA published shortly after President Arroyo's U.S. visit, ten thousand to fifteen thousand jobs were expected to open even beyond Iraq in countries including Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar because of expected "billion dollar infrastructure development projects in the Middle East (gas, electricity, water, finance, communications, engineering design, retail, health services, construction, IT, hotel/tourism)," attributed "to the presence of US forces."⁹

If the Philippine state facilitates the out-migration of its citizens, just as importantly it attempts to shape its overseas citizens' economic and political connections to the Philippines. The Philippines' "profitability" as a "global enterprise" hinges on its ability to maintain its overseas citizens' relations to the homeland. Labor brokerage requires a particular set of relations between state and citizen. Under a migration regime of labor brokerage, Philippine citizens are to leave their families behind in the Philippines while giving themselves over to employers in faraway destinations. At the same time, they are to continue being linked to the homeland, especially through their remittances, as the foreign exchange generated by migrants' overseas wages has become vital to the Philippine economy. In 2008

Product	Earnings
Electronic products	\$1.915 billion
Remittances	\$1.494 billion
Articles of apparel and clothing accessories	\$125 million
Coconut oil	\$80 million

Figure 2. Earnings from the three top export products compared with remittances for the month of July 2009. Sources: POEA, National Statistics Office (NSO).

alone, migrants remitted over U.S.\$16 billion through official banking channels.¹⁰ It is true that the very structure of the migrant labor system functions in such a way that individuals working overseas necessarily remit their earnings to their dependents left behind in the Philippines.¹¹ Still, the state invests heavily in channeling migrants' remittances back to the Philippines, with special emphasis on securing their remittances through official banking channels as well as state-sponsored development projects.

The Philippine state's transnational migration apparatus has become something of an "export-processing zone" that assembles and mobilizes and exports a commodity, workers, that actually rivals other export commodities in terms of profitability. A comparison of earnings from the Philippines' top three highest earning export products with remittances in the month of July 2009 indicates that remittances from migrants are second only to electronic products (Figure 2). In other words, in the Philippines the export of people can be more profitable than the export of clothing.

It is because Philippine migrants are short-term employees that labor-receiving countries source their workers from the Philippines. The Philippine state's future deployments of migrants (and ultimately remittances), therefore, depend on its ensuring that migrants are compliant with the terms of their employment contracts. In other words, the Philippine government requires that migrants return home to the Philippines immediately upon the completion of their work. The Philippine state's investments in its relations to its citizen-workers globally are crucial for accomplishing that task.

This book examines how and why the Philippine state has emerged as a “global enterprise” of labor. It uses a case study of the Philippines to understand contemporary processes of neoliberal globalization. As Neferti Tadiar argues, “The Philippines is, as a supplier of global labour, a constitutive part of the world-system.”¹² A key objective here is to map what Saskia Sassen calls a “countergeography of globalization,” that is, a form of globalization “either not represented or seen as connected to globalization,” yet is “deeply imbricated in some of the major dynamics constitutive of globalization.”¹³

My findings draw on qualitative methods including ethnographic research of the government’s migration bureaucracy, interviews with state officials and migrants, and archival work of government documents conducted over the course of the last decade.¹⁴ I examine the mechanisms by which the Philippine state mobilizes, exports, and regulates migrant labor to meet worldwide gendered and racialized labor demand. At the same time, I examine how the state has reconfigured Philippine citizenship and produced novel invocations of Philippine nationalism to normalize its citizens’ out-migration while simultaneously fostering their ties to the Philippines. Though I begin with a quote from the Philippine president, this book is fundamentally about the quotidian institutional and discursive practices of the state.¹⁵

To get at why the Philippines has become a global broker of labor and the kind of functions it performs in the contemporary global order, however, requires first an understanding of how neoliberal globalization has reshaped the role of states more broadly and an understanding of the new forms of labor demand engendered by contemporary globalization. I turn to a discussion of the existing scholarship on the state and globalization and international migration in the sections that immediately follow.

Brokering Labor as a Neoliberal Strategy

Neoliberalism, “Development,” and the Nation-State

Under conditions of neoliberal globalization, the forms and functions of the nation-state have been shifting quite dramatically. While

many scholars have lamented the eclipse of the state by the forces of global capital, many others suggest that what we are apprehending is in fact its reconfiguration. Rather than being hollowed out, the state has created new apparatuses by which to actually facilitate neoliberalism. As David Harvey argues, the neoliberal state seeks out “internal reorganizations and new institutional arrangements that improve its competitive position as an entity vis-à-vis other states in the global market.”¹⁶ In her critique of Harvey Aihwa Ong suggests, first, that neoliberalism, although hegemonic globally, should not be understood as having common, universalized consequences. She further argues that “rather than taking neoliberalism as a tidal wave of market-driven phenomena that sweeps from dominant countries to smaller ones, we could more fruitfully break neoliberalism down into various technologies.”¹⁷

Neoliberal orthodoxy consequently takes different shapes in different states. Moreover, it requires that states develop an arsenal of strategies to meet its imperatives. In the Philippines, for instance, the state has introduced numerous measures to create “new institutional arrangements” necessary to neoliberal globalization. Like other developing countries, it has complied with the mandates of what critics of neoliberalism have called the “Washington Consensus,” which involves privatization, deregulation, and liberalization among other sets of economic reforms or “structural adjustments.”¹⁸ But unlike other states in the global South, the Philippines has crafted a strategy of labor brokerage by which it mobilizes and deploys labor for export to profit from migrants’ remittances. Remittances from migrants’ overseas employment has strengthened the government’s foreign exchange reserves, helping the Philippines pay off the onerous debts it has incurred from lenders like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, along with a host of private banks, as a consequence of structural adjustment programs.

The Philippine state is not, however, simply a passive actor in the global order as elites at its helm have enthusiastically implemented policies compliant with the neoliberal Washington Consensus. Developing countries “are undertaking restructuring and serve the needs of transnational capital not simply because they are ‘powerless’ in the

face of globalization, but because a particular historical constellation of social forces now exists that present an organic social base for this global restructuring of capitalism.”¹⁹

Neoliberalism in the Philippines and other formerly colonized areas needs to be understood within the context of legacies of imperialism. For the Philippines neoliberal strategies of the state have long been shaped by its status as a neocolony of the United States. One can argue that neoliberalism in the formerly colonized global South is a contemporary form of coloniality.²⁰

In a neocolonial, neoliberal state like the Philippines, labor brokerage functions to address the failures of so-called “development.”²¹ It is a peculiar kind of “trickle up” development as individual migrants’ earnings abroad become a source of foreign capital for the Philippine state. The Philippine state remains committed to drawing direct investments from foreign capital through neoliberal economic reforms; however, it also heavily draws on “investments” from its very own citizens. The strategy of labor brokerage merely “perpetuates the conditions this policy claims to ameliorate and reinforces the IMF structural adjustment policies’ grip on Philippine underdevelopment since remittances mainly go to debt servicing rather than to generating new local employment projects,” as Ligaya McGovern suggests.²² It is still a cornerstone of Philippine neoliberal “development” today. As E. San Juan acerbically, though accurately, puts it, the globalization of Philippine workers “is primarily due to economic coercion and disenfranchisement under the retrogressive regime of comprador-bureaucratic (not welfare-state) capitalism.”²³

Neoliberal Governmentality

Though neoliberalism is characterized by a set of economic rationalities, as distilled in the Washington Consensus, neoliberalism is also a technology of governmentality. Aihwa Ong, drawing from Foucauldian understandings, suggests that neoliberalism is a mode of governing populations. She argues that the “neoliberal politics of ‘shrinking’ the state are accompanied by a proliferation of techniques to remake the social and citizen-subjects.”²⁴ By brokering labor, the Philippine state attempts to contain the multiple social

dislocations that are the consequence of its aggressive implementation of neoliberal economic policies. It represents employment abroad and remittances as the fulfillment of a new form of nationalism. Contemporary Philippine citizenship has become a modality of governmentality.

The consequences of the neoliberal Washington Consensus have been disastrous for ordinary people in the Philippines, as they have been for most people throughout the world as they face increasingly precarious conditions of employment (if they are employed at all) and the elimination of state services.²⁵ In the Philippines, structural adjustment has resulted in currency devaluation (meant to be an enticement for foreign investors), which has reduced real incomes in the Philippines, making it difficult for people to cope with the rising costs of living, which include the burden of having to pay for what were once state-subsidized public services. As the already small middle class tries to maintain its tenuous status, the difficulty of everyday life for the working classes and the poor compel many to join up with militant leftist movements, both legal and underground, to contest the state's neoliberal orientation.²⁶ Economic and political elites in the Philippines are all too familiar with the sorts of explosive upheavals these tensions can give rise to.

When the state's neoliberal policies are coupled with charges of graft and corruption, as was the case for President Joseph Estrada in 2001, mass protests can bring an administration down. Overseas jobs address Philippine citizens' dire need for livable wages and arguably contain social unrest to some extent.²⁷ Under conditions of globalization, elites have to deal with "the contradictory pressures of (global) accumulation and (national) legitimation. This enduring contradiction is being managed by a restructuring of the capitalist state and a realignment of internal power relations within national state apparatuses."²⁸ Successive Philippine presidents have offered up the promise of employment (albeit overseas) during the bleakest economic crises to calm citizens' growing anxieties about job prospects, and in the Philippines labor brokerage is an important legitimization scheme for the state.

Of course, states' legitimacy is not confined to the national arena. According to Aihwa Ong, developing and newly industrializing states concern themselves with accumulating status and recognition in the global context.²⁹ Social prestige in the world order is also gendered as well as racialized. L. H. M. Ling argues that "biological males (the 'native man'), masculinized conventions ('Third World state'), and even socioeconomic systems ('developing economies') can be feminized if they are viewed as backward, weak, or poor — traits conventionally associated with femininity" and, it can be argued, with nonwhiteness.³⁰ "The accumulation of capital, the organization of the labor process, the construction of the modern nation-state," as Winant argues, was "all fashioned in the global racial workshop."³¹ Represented by neighboring Asian leaders and economists as Asia's perennial failure,³² the Philippine state is invested in recuperating its feminized status through policy interventions that conform to hegemonic white, masculinized global conventions.

It is within the context of tremendous uncertainty that the government's relentless pursuit of neoliberal restructuring has produced the Philippine state's promotion of overseas employment among its citizens. Employment abroad allows Philippine citizens to earn incomes far greater than would be possible in the Philippines (in part because the peso is so devalued) and therefore sustain their families' well-being, at least for the immediate future. There is something quintessentially neoliberal about labor brokerage as a technology of government. It requires the responsabilization of Philippine citizens who are to directly bear the costs of neoliberal restructuring as their remittances go to debt servicing. Moreover, as the Philippine state withdraws social supports and thereby passes on the costs of education, health care, and other expenses to its citizens, brokering labor absolves the state from having to provide services directly to its citizens. Ordinary people are forced to bear sole responsibility for the costs associated with newly privatized services with the wages they earn abroad.

The labor brokerage state simultaneously extends new kinds of "rights" and benefits to its overseas citizens. New iterations of citizenship, what might be termed oxymoronically enough *migrant*

citizenship, become a means by which the state deftly masks how the entitlements of Philippine citizenship are in fact dwindling under conditions of neoliberalism. Since its inception, the Philippine state's migration regime has included provisions that are supposed to protect migrants from exploitative working conditions as well as entitlements reserved only for overseas workers. These protections promise, for example, the Philippine state's extraterritorial intervention in contractual disputes workers may have with their employers. As women's migration began to outpace men's migration and moral panics about the absence of mothers from their families proliferated, the state also created mandatory training programs for women seeking employment in what have been officially categorized by the government as "vulnerable" occupations (domestic work and "entertainment").³³ Migrants are eligible for skills training and upgrading while they are abroad and when they return to the Philippines. Their children can even qualify for scholarship funds. In fact, overseas employment itself is cast as a "right" of Philippine citizens, which the state pledges to guarantee.

Migrant citizenship is aimed at placating migrants' fears about being vulnerable as foreign workers abroad. It is a reactive measure to Philippine citizens' transnational protests against the unjust treatment of migrants at the hands of foreign employers and governments through migrant citizenship. The state pledges particular kinds of protections and entitlements to secure legitimacy for its migration program among its citizens — both those who leave as well as those who stay. By offering migrants what is essentially a portable set of "rights," the state can represent itself as a caring and virtuous state committed to its citizens. Moreover, through migrant citizenship, the Philippine state can secure the legitimacy of labor brokerage as a strategy on an international scale as rights regimes are a hallmark of democratic governance, necessary for acceptance into the fraternity of nation-states. For the most part, migrant citizenship comes with few guarantees, yet it becomes an important technique by which the Philippine state reshapes its relations to its citizens under conditions of neoliberal globalization.

If the Philippine state has reconfigured citizenship, it has necessarily rearticulated ideas of nationalism and national belonging for the purposes of brokering labor. After all, in a society where people are forced to secure their livelihoods far from their families and country of birth, ideas of “home” and “the nation” are destabilized. With the increasing importance of overseas employment, the Philippine state has come to represent migrants as “new national heroes.” Rather than denigrating out-migration as a “brain drain” (and therefore some kind of nationalist betrayal) or employing punitive methods to force migrants to remit their earnings back to the Philippines, working abroad and remittances are recast as nationalist acts.

“Heroism,” however, comes with responsibilities. While migrants are valorized as “heroes,” the state also expects them to be exemplary representatives of the nation abroad. Workers are expected to be law-abiding, diligent workers who return to the Philippines once their employment visas expire. When workers fail in their nationalist duties, the Philippine state deploys numerous mechanisms to discipline them transnationally. Here migrant citizenship becomes a means by which the Philippines can, in fact, regulate migrants to obtain their remittances on the one hand and, on the other, intervene extraterritorially when migrants need to be brought under control since foreign states increasingly defer to the Philippine state as the appropriate custodian over unruly Philippine workers.

The Brokerage State and the Regulation of Global Labor Flows

While brokering labor serves the Philippine state’s neoliberal imperatives domestically, it also performs the function of regulating flows of workers globally. As neoliberal globalization engenders new kinds of racialized and gendered labor demands, the Philippine state’s system of labor brokerage enables the controlled flows of temporary workers across national borders, mobilizing them out of the Philippines and then ensuring their return back home. I would even suggest that labor brokerage might be a necessary institutional form (though

problematic, especially for workers) under conditions of neoliberal globalization.

Neoliberal globalization is giving rise to the restructuring of labor markets and the reorganization of work and thereby creating structural demands for foreign migrant workers. Demands for foreign workers in the more economically privileged areas of the world system and prevailing inequalities between those areas and the periphery create the macrostructural conditions for international migration. Employers' ability to secure migrants is often mitigated by the resurgence of varieties of xenophobia and nationalism that are partly, it can be argued, a response to the new kinds of insecurities citizens of different countries around the world experience as a consequence of neoliberalism. In the face of precarious employment and dwindling social supports, many people are compelled to safeguard whatever limited entitlements their citizenship may offer under neoliberalism and call for immigration restrictions.

Regimes of labor brokerage, therefore, might offer a kind of institutional "fix" resolving global capital's demand for labor and neoliberalizing labor-importing states' demand for temporary migrants who will not make claims for membership and will return to their countries of origin once their jobs are done.³⁴ Labor brokerage systems can operate therefore at the convenience of global employers and host states. Employers need not assume liability for immigration law violations by employing "illegal" workers, yet they can still profit from wage differentials between native-born and foreign workers. They can, moreover, continue to exercise tremendous control over migrants whose legal status is attached to them. Employers are also able to take advantage of a temporary labor force that will not burden them with demands for wage increases or seniority benefits over time and is less likely to be organized by unions. They can, furthermore, benefit from the embodied labor of migrants, taking advantage of their bodily capacities for labor while they are yet in their physical prime. Labor-receiving states, meanwhile, can be assured a stock of temporary migrants who are tethered to their home countries and less likely to partake of government services.

International organizations like the World Bank (WB), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have increasingly been championing guest worker programs (which systems of labor brokerage are) as the solution to the contradictions between global labor demand and immigration restriction. These organizations anticipate that guest worker programs will have:

“win-win-win” outcomes, as migrant workers win by earning higher wages abroad, migrant-receiving countries win with additional workers who expand employment and economic output, and migrant-sending countries win via greater remittances and the return of workers who gained skills abroad. Workers often lose in the process.³⁵

The Philippines is often held up as a “model” of “migration management,”³⁶ and there is in fact growing evidence that developing states around the world are engaging in their own kinds of “migration management” or what I call “labor brokerage” systems. Critically analyzing labor brokerage in the Philippines, therefore, becomes an urgent project, especially if we are concerned about what labor brokerage means for people’s prospects to live and work with dignity and under conditions free from exploitation.³⁷

The labor-sending state is perhaps the institution most able to effectively resolve the contradictory forces of labor demand and immigration restriction. It can perform regulatory functions that can be performed only by states. While private labor recruiters might be able to mobilize workers for overseas employers, they will ultimately confront state borders that may or may not permit migrants entry.³⁸ It is true that labor recruiters often move workers across these boundaries clandestinely; they may even produce fabricated documents to get past immigration authorities. Unauthorized migrations, however, pose too many challenges for labor-receiving states. They are forced to deal with multiple and contradictory domestic pressures from nativist groups, immigration rights advocates, and employers, as well as international pressures to conform to human rights conventions with respect to so-called “illegal immigrants.” It becomes necessary for labor-receiving countries to identify alternatives to stringent immigration restrictions and the undocumented

migrations they produce. Labor brokerage states may be precisely what labor-receiving states need to regulate global circuits of migrants as the labor-sending state has the authority to claim and the capacity to execute control over its population. States have “monopolized” the authority to legitimately control the movements of people across national borders.³⁹ It is with respect to the issue of national belonging and citizenship, on which this authority over border crossings rests, that labor-sending brokerage states are able to play a role in the global regulation of workers in a way nonstate actors simply cannot.

States continue to need to assert symbolically, if not actually, their sovereignty over their territory against encroachments from outsiders. Nowhere is the idea of open borders considered acceptable with respect to people. Yet given the global demands for workers, sovereignty may be taking new forms: “The scope of sovereignty is not essentially and in all respects tied to the territorial limits of states, and the way in which the exercise of sovereignty is related to territory can vary over time and place.”⁴⁰ One way labor-receiving states may be able to secure their sovereignty in the face of international migration, undocumented and documented, may be to actually concede sovereignty to labor-sending states within the scope of their territory. That is, labor-receiving states can formally grant labor-sending states custodial power over their citizens. I would argue that the bilateral (and in some cases multilateral) negotiations that are increasingly vital to international transfers of labor are evidence of new configurations of sovereignty in labor-receiving and labor-sending states. One important bargain that is struck between these states is labor-receiving states’ relinquishment of control over migrants to their home states, control that labor-sending states are only too eager to accept. This seems to be the model favored by groupings like the newly formed Global Forum on Migration and Development, for instance, which I will discuss in more detail in this book’s conclusion. As Sassen correctly anticipates: “Reality has forced new conditions and new practices on the inter-state system. This contributes to the internationalization of the inter-state system and may well be an important precedent for handling other policy issues, including immigration, in a more multilateral manner.”⁴¹

The international system of states sustains the national “difference” on which migrant labor systems, as a source of cheap workers for global capital, depend. Because systems of labor brokerage rely on the reification of national identities and citizenship, labor-sending states become ideal suppliers of workers for the world. As William Robinson suggests, “National boundaries are *not* barriers to transnational migration but are mechanisms functional for the supply of labor on a global scale and for the reproduction of the system.”⁴² Global capital continues to rely on national boundaries even as neoliberalism demands the diminishing of these boundaries. The unequal value ascribed to different forms of national labor, which is often rendered in racialized and gendered terms, is the means by which capital can extract surplus value from workers.

Book Overview

In chapter 1, I provide historical context for the emergence of labor brokerage in the Philippines. I suggest that the institutional precursors for contemporary labor brokerage can be traced to the colonial labor system established under the Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, I argue that U.S. colonialism has had deep and lasting consequences for Philippine state formation and for the constitution of class relations in the Philippines well beyond formal national independence in 1946. Fundamentally a neocolonial state administered by elites long favored by the Philippines has been compliant with the U.S. hegemonic neoliberal economic prescriptions. The government has introduced export-oriented development to at once sustain a social order favorable to domestic elite interests while maintaining the Philippine state’s legitimacy in the global arena, where international recognition in the system of nation-states ultimately requires conformity to capitalist logics. Because neoliberalism has fundamentally destabilizing effects — effects that are significantly gendered — labor brokerage has become necessary to contain the social, political, and economic dislocations it produces. Labor brokerage became a practicable strategy for the government as international migration from the Philippines had already been normalized under

the U.S. colonial administration. The Philippine state opportunistically took advantage of these historical legacies, on the one hand, and new forms of labor demand globally on the other in order to profit from the export of its citizens.

In chapters 2 and 3, I illustrate the specific mechanisms by which the Philippine state mobilizes workers for out-migration by examining the functions of the Philippines' transnational migration bureaucracy. I get at the "micropolitics" of power, those realms of state practice that often go overlooked and yet are essential to processes of globalization. I illustrate how the state has created education and training programs that are actually matched to the demands of labor markets around the world, which are monitored by the Philippines' global network of embassies and consular offices. I show how the state, moreover, uses its transnational apparatus to actively advertise Philippine migrants to overseas employers and to begin bargaining with foreign governments to facilitate their workers' out-migration. The state draws on racialized and gendered logics to pitch Philippine workers to foreign employers and governments (as Arroyo does above) as race and gender structure global demands for migrant labor. My discussions in this chapter draw from archival research of Philippine government documents, interviews with Philippine migration bureaucrats, ethnographic observations of the migration bureaucracy, as well as interviews with migrant workers themselves.

In chapter 4, I explore how the state has reconfigured meanings of nationalism and national belonging with respect to overseas migration, what I call migrant citizenship, to make the act of temporarily living and working abroad a commonsensical practice for ordinary people. The system of labor brokerage in the Philippines rests on a particular (one might dare say peculiar) sort of state-citizen relation. Under a regime of labor brokerage, Philippine nationalism is accomplished through one's departure from the nation-state. One is not, however, conscripted into military service, for instance. One is instead conscripted to serve as part of a reserve army of labor. State-citizen relations in the neocolonial, neoliberal Philippines is necessarily fragile, and it is therefore a site of persistent investment. The state engages in the active construction of citizenship through

a myriad of practices. In this chapter, I am interested in its everyday bureaucratic practices as well as more formal policies. Bureaucracies and various kinds of bureaucratic practices are especially rich sites of study because it is in bureaucratic spaces and through both the banal and ostentatious practices of government that states and citizens encounter one another most intimately.⁴³ Hence, in addition to examining laws and other legal-judicial instruments to track shifts in citizenship, this chapter draws on ethnographic research, interviews with migration bureaucrats, and examinations of government documents produced and circulated within migration agencies.

The meanings of citizenship are often structured by gendered logics, as men and women figure very differently in the national imagination. Chapter 5 explores public debates about women's migration that plagued the Philippine state throughout the 1990s. As women's out-migration as domestic workers (as well as other gender-typed workers) began to outpace the out-migration of male migrants, public debates raged about whether the Philippines should either curtail or better regulate women's emigration. Nationalist anxieties were heightened by what was perceived as the "shame" women's out-migration as domestic workers brought to the Philippines' subject status globally. These anxieties fed into mass protests with the hanging of a Filipina domestic worker, Flor Contemplacion, by the Singaporean government in 1995. Protesters were outraged that the Philippine state did not prevent her execution. The transnational mobilizations, however, forced the Philippines to introduce new migration reforms manifested in the Act of 1995. In this chapter, I explore the gendered consequences these reforms had for understandings of nationalism and national belonging as they apply specifically to migrant women.

Chapter 6 focuses on the processes and outcomes of a wildcat strike where Philippine migrant workers employed in Brunei, exerting some of the very "rights" spelled out in the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act, enlisted the assistance of Philippine state representatives to advocate on their behalf for higher wages and working conditions. Here I examine what migrant citizenship means for migrant workers and for the Philippine state in practice. On the

one hand, the case demonstrates how the Philippine migrants often see their interests tied to and guaranteed by the Philippine state. On the other hand, as the outcome of the struggle reveals, though Philippine officials intervene on their citizens' behalf to some extent, they are willing to discipline those who threaten the Philippines' relations with foreign employers and host countries through forced repatriation and other sanctions.

In my concluding chapter I discuss the key insights my work on the Philippines offers to the scholarship on the state and international migration within the context of globalization. I then briefly describe emergent forms of labor brokerage outside the Philippines and suggest how my study here might inform future studies of this phenomenon. Finally, I discuss alternative meanings of rights and membership that migrant workers' groups like Migrante International offer. Migrant activists construct important visions of more equitable ways of being and belonging that become vital to consider in today's neoliberal global order.