

**Robyn Magalit Rodriguez, *Migrants for Export – How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2010, 208 pp.**

Much has been written about labor migration and its ties to globalization. Robyn Magalit Rodriguez's book *Migrants for Export, How the Philippine State Brokers Labor to the World* is a major addition to the topic. This book can be found on the Sociology/Asian Studies shelf but might also appeal to readers having an interest in state, gender, neoliberalism and neocolonialism studies. The key question of the book is why and how the Filipinos have become the most global workforce. This is explored using a framework that focuses on mobilization, exports and the regulation of migrants. Various data is placed into an ethnographic research framework: investigations of governmental migration bureaucracy and archival work, as well as interviews and observations. With these findings, the author argues that the Philippine state has a huge responsibility when acting as a state brokering agency. Light is shed on how different governments address this issue, primarily the Philippine but also the labor-receiving states. To this end, the author introduces a complex field of relations between the labor-sending state and labor-receiving states, transnationalism and nationalism, various discourses of gender and race and their mutual connections and impacts. Additionally, Rodriguez presents this issue's close ties to neoliberal globalization.

To start, Rodriguez provides us with an in-depth and well-written treatment of neoliberalism and its governmental manifestations, with an emphasis on the Philippine state. In order to adapt to neoliberal globalization, the Philippine state followed the "Washington consensus" model. This includes various economic reforms and structural adjustments, for instance privatization, deregulation and liberalization. Rodriguez then elaborates on the term *labor brokerage state*. Rodriguez argues that the U.S. colonial era had an impact on the contemporary Philippine state and questions to what degree the Philippine state is independent. According to Rodriguez, neocolonial traces have been shaped as an outcome of the colonial history between the U.S. and the Philippines. Rodriguez argues that free trade and export-oriented development, two crucial features of neoliberalism, make overseas employment beneficial for maintaining neocolonial patterns. In addition, it is a necessity for the population of the Philippines to have a sufficient income.

Bureaucratic processes that assure the adaptability of labor to the host country are vital. In order to keep labor migrations from being anything but a burden on the host countries' economy and the labor market, agencies are required. These agencies map potential migrants at a national level and license them through skill training and assessment programs. In the meantime, on the international level, global labor demands are mapped by tracing visa categories designed for foreign workers. Furthermore, the Philippine state conducts its labor brokerage operations by marketing Filipinos and Filipinas as reliable laborers. To best deploy their workers, the Philippine state needs to be continuously updated with political and economic agendas, transformed and characterized by neoliberal globalization. In this context, Rodriguez shows how ethnic entanglement is used in various discourses to promote the Philippines as a comparatively benevolent state.

Nationalism, Rodriguez further elaborates, serves several purposes, one of them being to control the remittances from the Philippine migrant laborers. These remittances are invested by the state, preferably for developmental purposes. Rodriguez gives an overview of how *balikbayan*, the nation returnee program established in 1973, shifted public discourse by moving away from brain-drain and national betrayal to *bagong bayani*, an expression for new national heroes. Rodriguez also examines the gendering processes of the labor force. Women have come to play an important role in labor brokerage. They are depicted as the best entertainers and care workers, which is why they are perceived as being needed. However, in the Philippines, women working overseas are considered to be the source of family concerns. With regard to motherhood and reproduction, the women working overseas are blamed, in the long run, for undermining the nation. Moreover, Rodriguez gives us an insight into the

migrants' struggles for their rights in a global society where different states and agencies are refusing to take responsibility. When issues about agreements occur, Philippine workers abroad struggle to get support from their government. It becomes apparent that documents issued by the Philippine government are not accepted in all national contexts, and where they are, the employees are victimized with respect to how the host governments interpret these employment terms. The migrant workers' protection from exploitation, for instance, is therefore at risk as soon as they cross the Philippine border to work overseas.

Rodriguez's main message is a criticism of the contemporary neoliberal order, characterized by serving a globalized economy. In order to support this, she advocates for a better understanding of the role of the state, in this case the Philippine state, in contemporary labor migration patterns. The informal and formal relationships between the Philippine state as a labor-sending state and the labor-receiving states are highlighted several times. The Philippine state has become a leading state in this issue and has taken on an expert role, providing consulting for other countries, mainly in Southeast Asia. Therefore, the Philippine state can be perceived as being in an extraordinary position within the neoliberal globalized world order. The state, Rodriguez argues, outpaces the private agencies regarding the control of migrations. However, private labor recruiters provide clandestine assistance to migrants to help them cross borders and bypass immigration laws and restrictions. These unauthorized migrants provide a challenge for the receiving states, by creating stresses on the states' approaches to domestic and immigration rights. In addition, the states also have to deal with human rights conventions for undocumented migrants, often referred to as "illegal immigrants". This prompts the receiving states to control their borders and not to be too generous with admission, especially towards the undocumented migrants. This imposes a specific relationship between the states in order to control the out- and inflows of migrants.

In addition, Rodriguez describes how the states can use their power and benefit from international labor flows while ignoring the dignity of the migrant workers. Due to their (temporary) status, the migrant workers are highly unlikely to demand increased rights related to their working conditions. Therefore the receiving states do not have to be overly concerned about them. In addition to all the remittances the Philippine state receives from their overseas working population, the state also benefits from the very absence of the migrants, since it does not have to provide any governmental services for these people. This outlines the states' benefits from brokering labor. It also frames the migrant workers as the main losers in the process. Rodriguez emphasizes that an examination of these processes and the states' approaches is vital in order to address the (im)possibilities for the migrant workers to live with dignity in an environment free from exploitation. Rodriguez manages to frame the importance of an analysis on a macro level in order to understand the international mobility of labor as a consequence of the neocolonial order and not only the neoliberal economy. Rodriguez is clear in her position that former colonized areas have to be understood in a context of imperialistic heritage. It might even be argued that neoliberalism is a form of ongoing colonialism. Hence, Rodriguez argues, more research should be conducted within the same framework in order to further investigate labor brokerage states in this time of globalization. It is clear that Rodriguez is passionate about her topic and she manages throughout the book to provide a clear picture of the situation for the Filipino and Filipina migrants. In order to achieve this, she offers several perspectives: the colonial background, the marketing aspect, patriotism and nationalism, the gender perspective, as well as the rights perspective. The intention of the book is to scrutinize and criticize the Philippine state as a labor brokerage agency. However, she manages to go beyond that frame and also enlighten the reader about the complex consequences the migrants are facing at a micro level. Thanks to the use of multiple perspectives, she gives a comprehensive picture of what it means to be a labor migrant in an increasingly global world.

The journey on which the author takes the reader through the struggles of the Philippine brokered labor migrants is captivating. Books that highlight and problematize the power of states, powerful organs which should in no way be underestimated and, as the book reveals, do not operate in isolation,

rarely include civil society. Rodriguez, however, manages to incorporate the civil society and thereby illustrate the labor migrants as something more than just numbers and statistics. In addition, it is crucial to see the gravity in contemporary neoliberal economic patterns that not only impacts but rather determines peoples' lives. This book fuels the reader's desire to immerse themselves further in the situation of the labor migrants. Rodriguez is very clear about the message in the book and her approach towards neoliberalism as something that has a negative impact on many peoples' lives. She describes the pattern in order to explain how states function and how this impacts the civil society in general and labor migrants in particular. Rodriguez states that it could even be argued that labor brokerage is necessary for states in neoliberal globalized conditions. But she ends there. No further analyses are given. Even though it might be impossible to provide a "solution" to the neoliberal economy and the labor brokering states, it would have been nice if an attempt had been made. In its stead, Rodriguez discusses civil uprisings in terms of social movements and a potential global unity of labor.

Nevertheless, the power of the brokerage state remains. This leads to further questions: Is civil society the only hope? And if not, how can these structures be changed? Or should the contemporary global economy be accepted and only the rights and conditions within it change? Rodriguez seems equally powerless to answer these questions. She only provides the reader with a silence free for interpretation and some implications of coping strategies rather than a possible antidote. This might, however, be the best answer to these questions. The concern that neoliberalism brings requires continuous contemplation. As much as a quick solution to dismantling the world order would be satisfying for the moment, it would bring the entire content of the book and its sufficiency into question. As a result, the reader will experience some frustration after finishing the book. This might of course be the book's ultimate purpose. Rodriguez contributes serious material that gives a good insight into the complexity of neoliberalism and the contemporary global economy – a condition that affects all human beings around the globe in different ways. There is no doubt that the Filipino migrant population, one of the world's most widespread labor forces, deserves study at this level. Rodriguez approaches her assignment with great responsibility throughout the book, especially when she takes a reflective approach in her acknowledgements and when conducting her fieldwork. In summary, this book is a good way to deepen one's understanding of how the global workforce keeps the globe turning.

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