

Migrant Heroes: Nationalism, Citizenship and the Politics of Filipino Migrant Labor

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The Philippine state has popularized the idea of Filipino migrants as the country's 'new national heroes', critically transforming notions of Filipino citizenship and citizenship struggles. As 'new national heroes', migrant workers are extended particular kinds of economic and welfare rights while they are abroad even as they are obligated to perform particular kinds of duties to their home state. The author suggests that this transnationalized citizenship, and the obligations attached to it, becomes a mode by which the Philippine state ultimately disciplines Filipino migrant labor as flexible labor. However, as citizenship is extended to Filipinos beyond the borders of the Philippines, the globalization of citizenship rights has enabled migrants to make various kinds of claims on the Philippine state. Indeed, these new transnational political struggles have given rise not only to migrants' demands for rights, but to alternative nationalisms and novel notions of citizenship that challenge the Philippine state's role in the export and commodification of migrant workers.

Introduction

In 1995, Flor Contemplacion, a Singapore-based Filipina domestic worker, was hanged by the Singaporean government for allegedly killing another Filipina domestic worker and the child in her charge. When news about her imminent death reached the Philippines, Filipinos, throughout the nation and around the globe, went to the streets demanding that the Philippine government intervene to prevent Contemplacion's execution. Fearing Philippine-Singapore diplomatic relations would be threatened, then-Philippine President Fidel Ramos was reluctant to intercede despite evidence that may have proved her innocence. Ultimately, Flor Contemplacion was executed. In the wake of her death, thousands of Filipinos participated in a mass candlelight vigil in her memory. Many speculate that the numbers of people in the streets rivaled the numbers who had participated in the 1986 'People's Power Revolution' that led to the downfall of the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship. Contemplacion's death outraged

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Filipinos who believed that the Philippine government had the responsibility of intervening on behalf of Contemplacion because she was a Philippine citizen and, as a migrant worker, one of the country's so-called 'new national heroes'.

The Contemplacion execution and the events that followed it were significant in many ways. The public response to her execution is indicative of changing notions of Filipino nationalism and, ultimately, citizenship as it relates to overseas Filipinos. Hailed by the state as the 'new national heroes' of the Philippines, migrant workers have come to be important to the Philippine economy and national imaginary; an icon of the Philippines' export-oriented development. International migration has made significant contributions to the Philippine economy as thousands of Filipinos leave to work abroad daily, alleviating local unemployment and generating foreign exchange in the form of remittances which have sustained both migrants' families and the Philippine economy as a whole (Alegado, 1997; BLES, 2000; POEA, 2000). As the nation's 'heroes' and its significant source of both economic and political stability, migrants have demanded new kinds of entitlements as Filipino citizens even while they are abroad.

Not only was the mass protest following Contemplacion's hanging significant, perhaps more important was the passage of the Republic Act (RA) 8042, the 'Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995', signed into law just a few short months after her death. Indeed, though similar legislation had been previously introduced to the Philippine Congress, failing to become law, the public outcry in the wake of Contemplacion's execution forced Philippine lawmakers to seriously address the question of what kinds of rights or protections the state should extend to its citizens overseas (Herrera, 1995; Nuqui and Josue, 2000; Samonte *et al.*, 1995). RA 8042 signaled a new kind of relationship between the Philippine state and its migrant citizens. Highlighting the protection of Filipino workers overseas, the act critically redefined the state's relationship with its citizens abroad.

This paper explores contestations over Filipino nationalism and citizenship within the context of international labor migration. I examine the state's deployment of 'new national heroism', highlighting the ways this discourse has shaped citizenship struggles for Filipino migrants around the world. Philippine migration has critically transformed notions of Filipino citizenship and citizenship struggles. The discourse of 'new national heroism' is a means by which the state has attempted to incorporate Filipino migrant contract workers as part, not only of the national imaginary but, of the polity as the state has extended special kinds of entitlements to them even when they are overseas. Just as it has extended entitlements to migrant Filipinos, it also expects migrants to fulfill particular kinds of obligations to the state. Beyond designating one's legal status in a particular country, citizenship, in the case of Filipino migrants, has come to mean some economic and welfare privileges even outside of the country. I argue however that citizenship, and the obligations attached to it, is used as a state strategy for income generation for the Philippine government. Further, citizenship has become a means by which the Philippine state disciplines migrants as cheap workers for the global economic order. The contradiction between the state's requirement that migrants must ultimately be disciplined as flexible labor

and the 'protection' of migrants make the export of Filipino labor a tenuous state project as migrants contest the ways in which they have become exported and commodified. Transformations in notions of Filipino nationalism and citizenship have given rise to new kinds of transnational citizenship struggles allowing Filipino migrant workers to demand economic, political and cultural rights of the Philippine state wherever they may be. I explore how Filipino migrants offer alternative nationalisms and ultimately new notions of citizenship that not only challenge the Philippine state but migrants' insertion into the global economy as flexible labor.

Methodology

The data presented in this paper are based on four months of field research from May to August 1997 and 14 months of field research from June 2000 to August 2001 in the Philippines. In 1997, I lived and researched in several different sites including two rural communities and worked in the Metro Manila area at the headquarters of a global alliance of migrant workers' organizations, Migrante International, which is my focus here. I used participant observation techniques informed by feminist research methods engaging in both formal and informal interviews with migrants, their families, community members and activists. In 2000–2001 I conducted an ethnography of the Philippine state while also interviewing government officials involved in different aspects of migration. This paper draws primarily from the latter and also includes extensive analyses of government documents and previous research on Filipino migrants.

Globalization, Trans/nationalism and the Politics of Migrants

In their study of Filipino, as well as West Indian and Haitian, immigrants in the United States, Basch *et al.* find that 'transnationalism' characterizes the kinds of social relations these immigrants have engaged in across and beyond national borders. Transnationalism is characterized by familial, economic and organizational social relations that simultaneously connect them to their 'home' countries, while, paradoxically, their sustained linkages overseas allows them to be better integrated economically and politically in the United States. In other words, the transnational linkages immigrants engage in with their former countries of citizenship become a strategy for immigrants to assert their rights of citizenship in the United States

Transnationalism, however, is not only constituted by immigrants' practices; indeed, immigrants' transnational practices are also shaped by the deterritorialized nationalist projects being projected by their 'home' countries. The Haitian, Trinidadian, St. Vincentian and Philippine governments have all made appeals to their immigrants in the United States to participate in nationalist economic and political projects back in the 'homeland'. Immigrants, despite their permanent settlement in the United States or even their US citizenship, are called upon to invest in economic development projects at 'home' through their remittances and

investments. They are also rallied to support particular political candidates. In some cases, they are even encouraged to pressure the United States government for specific economic or political projects deemed important by these states.

Immigrants, these authors argue, have been highly receptive to what the authors call 'hegemonic' nationalist identities. Nationalist projects engaged in by their 'home' states become increasingly significant for immigrants because their economic and political incorporation into the United States as racialized and ethnicized workers is limited. While different kinds of political alignments (with other people of color, as 'African-Americans' or 'Asian-Americans') may prove to be a means by which immigrants can make both political and economic gains in the United States, the hegemony of nationalist identities makes deterritorialized nationalist projects more significant for many immigrants. Paradoxically, however, 'the entry of immigrant organizations into the political arena back home has worked to strengthen their incorporations into the United States' (Basch *et al.*, 1994).

Indeed, for Basch, Schiller and Blanc, it is immigrants' national identities that are significant. Countering more conventional analyses of labor migration, they argue that international migration is not only about the migration of *labor*. They state that 'world systems theorists have tended to reduce migration to labor migration and immigrants to workers, eliminating all discussion of the many different racial, ethnic or national identities which shape people's actions and consciousness. Migrants are indeed providers of labor power for capitalist production in a world economy but they are at the same time, political and social actors' (Basch *et al.*, 1994).

While Basch, Schiller and Blanc offer important insights into understanding the complexity new forms of nationalism or transnationalism amongst immigrants, they are less clear as to what transnationalism means for migrants, or nationals of a particular country who work for short periods of time in a foreign country. It is true that immigrants, as these authors argue, even as citizens of (in this case) the United States, continue to be involved in 'deterritorialized' projects of their erstwhile 'home' states. However, US-based immigrants often have the economic and political privilege of becoming selectively and opportunistically involved in these nationalist projects in ways not possible for other kinds of migrants. As dollar earners and the largest source of foreign exchange to the Philippine economy, for instance, Filipino immigrants in the United States are wooed by the Philippine state as potential investors. Further, as US passport holders, they have the mobility to travel back and forth between the Philippines and the United States to involve themselves in Philippine social life. Hence, transnationalism for Filipino immigrants is a distinct phenomenon very different from the kind of transnationalism practiced by Filipino migrant contract workers. In these authors' attempt to grapple with the conceptual limits of the term 'immigrant' and the kinds of experiences immigrants have, they have problematically conflated the experiences of US-based immigrants versus short-term, labor migrants based in other countries.

Not only do immigrants practice very different forms of transnationalism from contract migrants, I argue that as the state engages in 'deterritorialized' projects,

it has attempted to incorporate its overseas nationals and citizens in very different ways. The modes of incorporation by the Philippine state of Filipino immigrants in the United States is very different from that of Filipino overseas contract workers and have very different consequences to the state's projects. While the Philippine state attempts to incorporate its erstwhile citizens to take advantage of their US dollars to support the state's development projects, its attempts to incorporate Filipino migrants is both for the economic benefits they bring to the country but also to mitigate against the kinds of political upheavals that the news of the exploitation and abuse of migrants can result in. As the Flor Contemplacion case exemplifies, the abuse and exploitation of national 'heroes' can elicit widespread unrest as the state's icons of economic development become threatened. Further, however, not only does the Philippine state avert potential political crises with the extension of specific kinds of entitlements to its overseas citizens, citizenship also has the effect of disciplining migrants as particular kinds of citizens as citizenship not only translates into entitlements but also requires obligations on the part of overseas Filipinos. I suggest that citizenship becomes a means by which the state disciplines migrants as cheap, flexible labor for the global economy.

It is the migration of contract laborers as opposed to emigrants that is posing more critical dilemmas for the Philippine state. Indeed it has been with the increasing numbers of migrant workers that state notions of citizenship have come to be most critically transformed. As state notions of citizenship have transformed so too have citizenship struggles. Increasingly, citizenship struggles have come to be globalized as Filipino migrants struggle to assert their rights wherever they may find themselves living and working. Yet even as citizenship struggles are globalizing, migrants continue to orient themselves to the 'home-land', advocating alternative nationalist visions and ultimately new ideas of citizenship.

Finally, while 'world systems theorists have tended to reduce migration to labor migration and immigrants to workers, eliminating all discussion of the many different racial, ethnic or national identities which shape people's actions and consciousness. Migrants are indeed providers of labor power for capitalist production in a world economy but they are at the same time, political and social actors', as Basch and colleagues argue, it is important to understand that even while migrants engage in nationalist struggles, they do also recognize how they have been inserted into the global economic order as cheap and flexible 'providers of labor power'. In my research I have found that Filipino migrants' rejection of state nationalism is premised precisely on the fact that the state has become an agent of global capital.

Philippine Migration, Nationalism and Citizenship

Balikbayans: Nationalism, Citizenship and Filipino Emigrants

While Filipinos have been emigrating and migrating to other countries for employment since before the turn of the nineteenth century, contemporary migration is marked by the active role of the Philippine state in brokering

Filipino labor. In the 1970s, the Marcos administration put forth an economic and political program compliant with the dominant development paradigm advanced by global capital and multilateral institutions like the IMF and World Bank (Hawes, 1987). Export-oriented and foreign-capital-dependent, Marcos' economic program which was to help the Philippine economy 'take off' to an advanced stage of economic development required the declaration of martial law in 1972, justified by the regime as necessary for instituting economic discipline (Bello and Broad, 1987). Struggling with balance of payment requirements and rising unemployment, President Marcos introduced, with Presidential Decree 442 in 1974, a policy of labor export creating state agencies charged with deploying Filipino workers overseas (Asis, 1992; Carino, 1992; Gonzalez, 1998).

Interestingly, while the Marcos administration suppressed citizenship rights with his declaration of Martial Law in 1972, it attempted to extend citizenship rights to its former nationals. President Marcos attempted to reincorporate Filipino immigrants into the Philippine economy through the 'Balikbayan' (nation returnee) Program in 1973. An extension of the Philippine government's tourism campaign, the Balikbayan program was an attempt to specifically attract Filipino immigrants back to the Philippines as, ultimately, glorified tourists. By allowing them to be 'nation returnees' (as Balikbayan is literally translated), the state provided immigrants with a special national status whose foreign currency (usually US dollars) when remitted or spent in the Philippines through tourism could invigorate the Philippine economy. National and local governmental offices were created to develop and promote the program that included providing Balikbayans with local festivals and tax exemptions (Richter, 1989). Further, Balikbayans served a political purpose for the Marcos administration. Balikbayans' presence as 'tourists' was an assurance to foreign investors of the nation's political stability. In essence, the Philippine state, in its deployment of 'Balikbayan', attempted to discipline its 'nation' beyond its borders. It attempted to constitute Filipino immigrants, appealing to their sense of nationalism, as part of the polity because of the money they generate and the legitimacy they conferred to the martial law state with their presence as tourists (Basch *et al.*, 1994; Blanc, 1996; Rafael, 1997).

New National Heroism: Incorporating Filipino Migrants, Disciplining Filipino Labor

Globalization's requirement of flexibility has given rise, in the Philippines, to a pool of highly mobile and flexible migrant laborers, making the Philippines one of the top labor exporting countries in the world. While Marcos' introduction of a policy of labor export was supposed to have been a temporary solution to the state's economic and political crises at the time, overseas employment has become a more permanent feature of the Philippine economy providing jobs, increasing household incomes and generating foreign exchange significant to funding trade deficits (Abella, 1992; Alegado, 1997; Canlas, 1996; Rodriguez, 1998).

Overseas employment has come to be a critical aspect of Philippine economic and political life. In numerous policy documents and public speeches, govern-

ment officials are clear that overseas migration contributes significantly to the Philippines and that Filipino overseas contract workers are the 'new national heroes' of the country. First, according to the state, migrants contribute to the economy in their remittances which amount to several billion dollars every year (BLES, 2000). Second, '[t]here is evidence the deployment of OCWs [overseas contract workers] may have blunted the Communist insurgency as well, by draining the sea of rural discontent in which the guerrillas thrive' (Department of Labor and Employment, 1995).

'New national heroism' unlike the notion of the 'Balikbayan' is a discourse that attempts to incorporate migrant laborers (as opposed to emigrants) as part of the nation. While the term 'balikbayan' is also used to refer to contract workers, 'new national heroism' is not used to describe emigrants from the Philippines. The language of heroism to refer to specifically Filipino contract workers has become quite pervasive in state discourse. It was former President Corazon Aquino who first characterized overseas contract workers as the 'new national heroes and heroines' and continues to be how politicians refer to migrant workers. Before his ouster in January 2001, President Joseph Estrada gave overseas workers a 'heroes welcome', greeting them at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport during Christmas 2000 with cash prizes and free plane tickets. Former President Fidel Ramos, Estrada's predecessor, initiated this practice. Further, while overseas workers have been known popularly as OCWs (overseas contract workers), the state has changed the language around migrants identifying them instead as overseas Filipino workers or OFWs. Purportedly a transition designed to capture the populations of Filipinos that are abroad but not necessarily working on short-term contracts, it is significant that the state emphasizes the Filipino-ness, or the nationality of workers in the diaspora with this term.

As 'new national heroes', the state requires that migrants be a particular kind of citizen. This is made clear in a motto emblazoned on many public schools, stating, '*Taas-Noo, Kahit Kanino sa Buong Mundo Tayo ay Pilipino*' ('Keep your head high in front of everyone in the whole world because we are Filipino'). The state's project is quite clear in this statement. Inherent in the motto is the expectation that students will go on to other parts of the world and, additionally, it reminds these same students that wherever they may find themselves, they will always be Filipino.

As a consequence of the state's attempt to incorporate overseas Filipinos, specifically migrant contract workers, as nationals, it has become subject to demands by this very population that citizenship rights must also be extended to them while they are abroad. With the hanging of Contemplacion, this became critical. Not only would the state have to recognize Filipinos migrants as a part of the nation, it also had the responsibility for extending citizenship rights to them even overseas.

Republic Act 8042, what many politicians called the 'Magna Carta' for migrants, was passed as a result of the public pressure that the state guarantee the rights of Filipinos working overseas. As such, RA 8042 outlines migrant workers' rights abroad as Filipino citizens. It guarantees that workers will be protected in the process of securing overseas employment and that they will be

provided welfare services while they are working abroad. Hence, the act covers the areas of employment, illegal recruitment and social and legal services. The kinds of rights extended to contract workers suggest that overseas employment opportunities are part and parcel of Filipino citizens' economic rights while welfare services in Philippine embassies abroad are part of Filipinos' social rights when they are overseas. Further, while host states may not recognize the legality of undocumented Filipino workers, with RA 8042, the state asserts the primacy of migrants as Filipino citizens and hence entitles them to the same kinds of rights as all other documented Filipinos working overseas. Hence, just as Philippine nationalism has become transnational, citizenship entitlements for Filipinos are becoming increasingly globalized. It is changing the state's institutional structures, as the Philippine government's overseas offices become key sites for the provision of Filipino citizens' welfare rights.

While the state valorizes migrants as citizens and has acquiesced in providing for some of their rights as citizens while they are abroad, the kind of rights the state secures is ultimately limited and with these rights come obligations. For instance, while some economic and welfare rights may be guaranteed to overseas Filipino workers, they are denied the political right to vote in absentia. Indeed, Filipino citizenship has become a means by which the Philippine state disciplines Filipinos as loyal citizens who will contribute to the Philippine economy through their remittances as well as disciplines them as cheap, ethnicized labor for the global economy. The state disciplines workers in both its representations of workers' obligations to the state and in the sanctions it imposes on workers when they do not comply with these obligations.

The *Handbook for Filipinos Overseas*, for instance, outlines migrants' rights and privileges overseas and in the Philippines; it also makes clear the state's vision for overseas workers—a vision that insists on workers' flexibility yet emphasizes workers' continued role as nationals and citizens. It states that 'By the 21st century, the Filipino is envisioned to be: mobile, flexible, entrepreneurial, nationalistic and tolerant'. It continues, emphasizing, 'Filipino migrants and their families are ... expected to continue to identify with the country'. While most of the document is in English, one small section is in Pilipino, the national language. The first statement in this section reads, '*dahil saan ka man naroon, Pilipino ka pa rin*'—'because wherever you are, you're always Filipino'. While the *Handbook* lists services available to Filipino workers overseas, it also details their tax obligations, noting that 'it is the duty of all Filipino citizens who are residents abroad and currently earning their incomes in foreign countries to file their income tax returns and pay tax due to the Philippine government' (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 1999). Indeed, the Philippine government is one of only a handful of developing countries that taxes its overseas citizens. Further, the state's overseas embassies and consular offices become sites where the state exercises its discipline as first embassy and consular staff make their rounds to workers' places of employment to remind workers and their tax obligations and workers go to these offices to pay them.

The Code of Discipline for Overseas Filipino Workers which defines a Filipino overseas contract workers' duties to family, employer, host state and the Philippine government states that Filipino contract workers are:

to abide by the terms and conditions of his employment contract, to behave in the best manner and tradition of a Filipino and to observe and respect the laws, customs, mores, traditions and practices of the country where his is working. It shall also be his obligation to abide with the requirements on remittance of earnings as well as to provide material help to his family during the period of his overseas employment. (POEA, 1996)

Indeed, workers who have violated the Code of Discipline, by not sending remittances home to their families or failing to comply with their employers' requirements, can have cases filed against them by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration or the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration. Should cases be filed against them workers can be fined or worse 'watchlisted' by these government agencies and prevented from working overseas again. What this suggests then is that the state disciplines workers as particular kinds of citizens: citizens who pay their taxes; citizens who send their remittances to their families in the Philippines; citizens who are flexible workers. Ultimately, the state disciplines its citizens, who are increasingly becoming the state's most profitable export, in order to secure an income for the government's coffers and to discipline flexible laborers for the global economy,

While the state may provide for the welfare needs of workers at its embassies and consular offices providing shelters, legal services, or even a place to celebrate national holidays, in terms of economic rights, it makes limited interventions on behalf of workers when they have problems with their employers. For instance, only recently, when Filipino contract workers in a Brunei garment factory went on a wildcat strike, the Philippines' response to the workers' demands that their employers abide by the provisions of the employment contracts that were approved by the Philippine government was to simply offer them an opportunity to be repatriated. For those who decided to return to the Philippines to pursue cases against the agencies that deployed them to Brunei, they have found themselves respondents to counter-claims filed by those very agencies to have them 'watchlisted' because they had allegedly violated the terms of their contracts by going on strike.¹

Indeed, while the Philippine government plays a critical role in maintaining that Filipino workers' contracts comply with local labor standards (all Filipino workers contracts are processed by the POEA), workers' employment contracts become the instrument by which workers are disciplined to comply with the obligations the state defines. For Filipino workers who wish to file claims against their employers for contractual violations, they are required to file only upon their return to the Philippines, and even then, they can only file claims against their deploying recruitment agency based in the Philippines. Should workers' actually file claims against their employers and if they are granted, employers share the burden of responsibility with the Philippine-based recruitment agencies which supplied them with workers. While thousands of Filipinos go abroad overseas and the news of contractual violations pour into the media, very few workers have actually filed claims against their employers with the Philippine government, and worse, on average only half of those cases favor workers

(Nuqui and Josue, 2000). Further, because recruitment agencies are jointly liable with the employers for these cases, ultimately, employers become spared the full burden of meeting their end of an employment contract. Contracts also spell out that Filipinos must remit their earnings to the Philippines, and in the case of seafarers, their contracts specify that they must specifically remit 80% of their salaries (POEA, 1996).

Indeed, by extending 'rights' to Filipino citizens abroad, the state ultimately takes away migrants' ability to assert their rights in the host country. Because they must file labor complaints in the Philippines, Filipino workers' citizenship, and the rights and obligations it implies, becomes in effect a source of labor control as workers' contracts provide mechanisms by which workers avoid confronting their employers or even their host states.

It may be argued that by expanding employment opportunities overseas, Filipinos' economic rights as citizens are being guaranteed and that, ultimately, as Filipino citizens Filipino migrants can never expect to be afforded the kinds of rights that the citizens of their host countries enjoy. Yet, because the Philippine state intervenes in accepting responsibility for its workers rather than demanding that host governments extend increased rights to foreign nationals it, in effect, helps to facilitate the disciplining of Filipino labor as foreign states import workers who lack the political, economic and social rights that their own citizens enjoy.

Aiwha Ong argues that as labor markets are made flexible and as workers are made mobile through labor migration, 'modes of labor regulation extend beyond the capitalist workplace per se to domestic units and to capitalist nation-states—the latter engaging in forms of discursive inscription and control' (Ong and Nonini, 1997) This is true for the Philippines. While the Philippine state requires labor's mobility, migrant workers also become subject to different forms of state regulation and control. Through discourses of nationalism, particularly identifying migrants as 'new national heroes', the state attempts to 'contain' migrant labor while simultaneously requiring its mobility. As the 'heroes' of Philippine society, migrants are extended limited rights and privileges. Yet ultimately, as citizens, Filipino migrants are expected and indeed forced to comply with particular obligations to their home state that ultimately serve the interests of global capital.

Changing ideas and practices of citizenship has led to new kinds of political struggles for migrants. While for some it has meant struggling for increasing entitlements for Filipinos overseas, for others it has mobilized them against the state which they see as the critical agent in their exploitation as workers. It is these contestations over citizenship that I highlight in the next section.

Alternative Nationalism, Transnational Political Struggles and Citizenship

While the Philippine state disciplines Filipino migrants as particular kinds of citizens, the globalization of citizenship rights has enabled workers to make new kinds of claims on the Philippine state. The public outcry that followed the hanging of Flor Contemplacion is perhaps the clearest instance that signaled contestations over Filipino citizenship as it relates to migrant workers. Filipino

migrant workers and their advocates, however, have different and competing notions about the question of migrant workers' citizenship. Some have advocated for the political enfranchisement of Filipino migrant workers through absentee voting. Others have taken a more 'supranational' approach, pushing for the protection of the human rights of migrant workers through UN and ILO conventions. Still others contest the Philippine state's project of economic development and the ways in which it is inserted into the global economy as a provider of cheap labor by aligning itself with the country's militant Left movement.

Various initiatives have been introduced to the Philippine Congress to grant Filipino overseas workers with the right to absentee voting (Samonte *et al.*, 1995). While no law has yet been passed to allow Filipino migrants to vote from abroad, there continues to be a campaign being waged by migrants for that right. Indeed, the issue of absentee voting emerged very critically during the most recent toppling of President Joseph Estrada in what has popularly been called 'Edsa II' and the national elections that took place several months after his ousting. The website www.elagda.com, for instance, not only encouraged overseas Filipinos to sign a petition supporting the ouster of President Estrada, it championed migrants' suffrage. Indeed, the writers believe that the future of Philippine politics lies in migrants being able to vote even while overseas. Indeed, overseas migrant workers were a very 'present absence' during the campaign to oust the former president, accused of graft and corruption. Overseas migrants called into radio and television stations, and wrote to newspapers to register their opposition to the president. Further, several political parties specifically targeting overseas Filipino workers participated in the May 2001 elections including the 'Bagong Bayani' Party and the 'OFW' Party.

Migrant worker NGOs under the umbrella of the Philippine Migrant Rights Watch have played a critical role in advocating for migrants' human rights. While the Philippines Migrant Rights Watch is critical of the state's implementation of legislation like RA 8042, it believes the full implementation of the law along with the recognition of migrant workers human rights as guaranteed by UN conventions by the Philippine government and host governments can better protect Filipino migrant labor. For these NGOs, supranational bodies like the United Nations are the institutions that can best secure migrant workers' rights. While local laws are important, they are not enough.

Ultimately, struggles for greater political enfranchisement, the reform of migration policy or even the adoption of global human rights conventions fail to fundamentally question the Philippine state's vision of nationalism and the ways it has played a role in disciplining Filipino migrants as cheap labor for the global economy. The alliance of migrant workers' organizations that comprise Migrante International, however, represents a very different approach to the question of nationalism and citizenship for migrant labor. It is here where we see an alternative nationalism, one which critiques the state and the state's compliance with the global capitalist order. Further, Migrante, perhaps more than other migrant organizations and advocates, has critically shaped migrant politics both nationally and transnationally. It was Migrante, for instance, that led the

protests against the hanging of Flor Contemplacion both in the Philippines and globally—protests which led to the RA 8042.

Migrante International has a global scope. It is an alliance of over 50 migrant organizations in 18 countries seeking to ‘strengthen unity among Filipino migrants and relatives’ organizations abroad and in the homefront’ (Gratela, 1997). While Migrante has affiliated organizations around the globe, it is headquartered in the Philippines with its office in Metro Manila operating as the coordinating center for global campaigns. Migrante organizations are limited to ‘people’s organizations’ of migrants (in other words, organizations led and comprised by migrants) excluding the membership of non-governmental organizations which it believes often fail to represent the genuine interests of migrants.²

The 1994 consultation that formed Migrante brought together representatives of migrant and immigrant organizations from Australia, Canada, Europe, Hong Kong, Japan, the Netherlands, Saudi Arabia, the US Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas Islands as well as organizers from the Philippines. What was significant about the consultation was that migrants and immigrants were not distinguished from one another. Instead, what the various organizations emphasized was that though Filipinos may immigrate, taking up residence in another country and revoking their Philippine citizenship, or whether they return to the Philippines at the end of a labor contract, the same conditions of underdevelopment drive Filipinos to leave the Philippines seeking livelihoods elsewhere. They state, ‘Migrante believes that Filipinos were practically pushed to leave their families and country because of extreme poverty imposed on the Filipino people by an unjust and exploitative social, economic and political system in the Philippines’ (Migrante International, 1994). This shared history is what links Filipinos, regardless of their citizenship, throughout the world. Further, because the Philippine state is responsible for ‘pushing people’ out of the country, wherever they are, Filipinos can and should make claims on the Philippine state.

Hence, for Migrante, citizenship is very differently understood than the citizenship envisioned by the Philippine state. While the Philippine state does in fact distinguish between Filipino immigrants such as those in the United States and Filipino overseas migrants, granting specific kinds of privileges to the one over the other, for Migrante ‘citizenship’ belongs to all Filipino nationals regardless of actual citizenship status. For Migrante, because Filipinos have been denied full citizenship in the Philippines, hence their having to leave the country, they are owed their Filipino citizenship by the Philippine state. Migrante does not focus on regularizing immigrants’ status as citizens in their host countries or on expanding migrants’ rights as temporary or long-term residents, though they do support initiatives that do so. Instead, Migrante directs its protest at the Philippine state and the conditions in the Philippines that have given rise to the necessity for many to emigrate and migrate. For Migrante, histories of imperialism, colonialism and the state’s compliance with the export-oriented development favored by institutions like the World Bank and IMF are responsible for ‘pushing people’ out of the Philippines.³

It is notable, for instance, that Migrante affiliated organizations campaign for migrants’ rights not by rallying in their worksites, or even in front of the labor

departments of the countries where they work, but in front of Philippine embassies from Hong Kong, Rome and Seoul. In the movement to oust former President Joseph Estrada, Migrante International was at the forefront of its global campaign because it saw the kind of corruption characterized by the Estrada administration as contributing to what they consider is the forced migration of Filipinos. Member organizations of Migrante International around the world joined in solidarity with the numerous anti-Estrada rallies held throughout the Philippines, protesting in front of Philippine embassies in various countries. Further, it was Migrante International that led the campaign calling for migrant workers to refrain from sending their remittances to the Philippines through banks owned by his cronies. The campaign was a major media event and a critical show of migrants' political and economic force outside of the country.

Further, for Migrante, the Philippine state has not only 'pushed' Filipinos out of the Philippines, it has profited from brokering Filipino labor as cheap laborers for global capital:

The Philippine state has bartered us to satisfy the needs and requirements of its foreign master and partners in exchange for dollars necessary to prop up its crises-ridden economy, finance its operations, and to fill up dirty dangerous, and difficult jobs which nobody in our host countries ever want. (Migrante International, 1994)

One of Migrante's major global campaigns currently, for instance, is against what they call 'state exactions', that is, the fees that Filipino workers must pay as they are processed for overseas employment by the state migration bureaucracy. In the past, it has campaigned against mandatory remittances and what they call 'double taxation'—the taxation of Filipino migrants by the Philippine government and their host states.

Yet, not only does Migrante critique the Philippine states' profit from migration in the forms of 'state exactions', remittances, or taxes, but that the state provides workers to 'fill up dirty, dangerous, and difficult jobs which nobody in our host countries ever want'. Hence, it critiques the Philippine state for its role in providing cheap labor for global capital. This is most clearly evidenced in its political alliance with the Philippines' Left. Migrante International played a significant role in the campaigning for the Bayan Muna party, the Left's first foray into electoral politics. Representing a platform that counters the neo-liberal program of the Philippine state, Bayan Muna campaigns for an end to labor contractualization, privatization and trade liberalization. Migrant workers on breaks from their overseas jobs campaigned vigorously in communities for the party's election in May 2001. Bayan Muna eventually won three seats in the Philippine congress with representatives including a former political prisoner and consultant to the communist-led National Democratic Front, the leader of the militant trade union alliance Kilusan Mayo Uno (the May First Movement), and the leader of the feminist alliance, GABRIELA. Indeed, Migrante is a member organization of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan or BAYAN (New Patriotic Alliance), an alliance of militant, left people's organizations. BAYAN has been at the forefront of anti-globalization campaigns both

regionally and globally with its hosting of the 'People's Conference Against Imperialist Globalization' in 1997. In November 2001, Migrante itself hosted an 'International Migrant Conference Against Labor Export and Imperialist Globalization'.

According to Migrante:

The only way in which we can rise out of this economic cesspool characterized by gross inequality is the radical and basic restructuring of the economy and society where wealth and income can be more evenly redistributed and utilized for the benefit of all. (Asia Pacific Mission for Migrant Filipinos, 1996)

This statement best captures the significance of Migrante's political work both in the Philippines and overseas. For Migrante, the ultimate resolution of the problems faced by Filipino migrants overseas lies in a 'radical and basic restructuring' of the Philippines. This is not a call merely for enfranchisement, or asserting migrants' human rights which some scholars and NGOs have argued become a critical source of the protection of migrants as they work overseas (Herrera, 1995; Sassen, 1996; Soysal, 1994), but rather it is a critique of the state, compliant with the demands of global capital, that has created the very conditions for migration.

Migrante has produced an alternative nationalism. Filipino nationalism here is a politicized and historicized national identity that posits a link between Filipino migrants, emigrants and those who continue to live in the Philippines not merely as Filipinos (in other words, an essential Filipino ethnic/national identity) but as Filipinos displaced by global capitalism relegating them to labor as ethnicized low-wage workers around the world. Migrante's politics ultimately challenges conventional notions of citizenship. For this movement, citizenship is not limited to one's legal status in a particular country, but in fact, citizenship is linked with an alternative nationalism. Further, because this nationalism is centrally concerned with Filipinos as a class of cheap ethnicized workers globally, the kind of citizenship Migrante envisions is one that provides for the economic, political and social rights for Filipino workers. This is made clear in their political alliances, campaigns and in Migrante's statement of unity:

Our ultimate aspiration is to stay and live with our families in a Philippines that is free from the exploitation and domination of imperialist powers, where farmers own the land they till and workers enjoy just employment and working conditions, justly compensated and justly treated, and where people's rights are upheld and defended. We recognize that this aspiration is one that we share with the vast majority of workers, peasants, and all democratic classes and strata in our country.

Citizenship for Migrante is ultimately about Filipinos' right to return 'home', and to reclaim the Philippines around an alternative nationalist project that privileges the rights of the working class and the dispossessed. Migrante rejects

the state's project of modernization and the nationalism and citizenship it requires. It ultimately advocates for a new kind of state with a new kind of class politics.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of international migration and its significance economically and politically for the Philippines state has raised critical questions about nationalism and citizenship. In order to contain im/migrants as national subjects linking them to the 'homeland', the state has attempted to incorporate them as 'Balikbayans' and 'New National Heroes', with the effect, for migrant workers, of the state using citizenship to discipline migrants as cheap and flexible labor. While I have demonstrated how migrants are disciplined by the state, I also show that migrants are agents who resist state discourses of nationalism. Migrants construct an alternative nationalism in opposition to the state's project of export-led development. It has meant that, for instance, contestations over Filipino citizenship are no longer confined to the borders of the Philippines but are transnational. Further, it has linked together migrants and immigrants in the diaspora, sometimes citizens of other countries, in a struggle to not only expand the economic, political and social rights and privileges of overseas Filipinos globally, but indeed to struggle for a new kind of citizenship at home.

While I have highlighted the ways that migrants are disciplined by Philippine state nationalism, it is important not to obscure the fact that Filipino migrants' lack of citizenship in their 'host' countries provides foreign governments with the disciplinary mechanisms of maintaining Filipinos as cheap labor as well. Indeed, Flor Contemplacion's execution in Singapore is illustrative of how migrants' lack of citizenship rights in their host countries (or perhaps precisely because of their *Philippine* citizenship) and failure to conform to their host state's expectations of foreign labor subjects migrants to the violence of these states. While Filipino migrants suffer very real consequences as workers in foreign countries, and do indeed struggle for better rights in these countries, they also struggle around alternative nationalist projects and ultimately for their rights as citizens in the Philippines.

As international migration increases around the globe, these findings raise important questions to be considered in future research, in particular, what new and alternative sorts of nationalisms become points of mobilization and how do they challenge neo-liberal globalization? By addressing these issues we can come to a better understanding of the ways people can negotiate and resist the dislocations that ultimately result from the global logic of capital that dominates at the dawn of a new century.

Notes

1. From interviews with repatriated workers, 2001.
2. From interviews with Migrante International activists in 2000 and 2001.
3. From interviews with Migrante International activists in 2000 and 2001.

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