"Is that the house of someone working abroad?": Neocolonialism, Exploitation, and Transnational Ties

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INTRODUCTION

This project focuses on the Philippines, a place with centuries of settler/colonial suffering. More specifically, I use storytelling as a method to gain a better understanding of the socioeconomic realities of Filipinos/as, especially in respect to the Philippine State’s particular position as one of the leading institutions which traffic peoples, through its Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) programs and incentives.

OBJECTIVES

• Use data that comes in the form of narratives and stories to capture the realities of marginalized peoples’ stories
• Decolonize my research by challenging and questioning the supposed divides between theory and practice

DESCRIPTION

In the coastal lowlands of the Eastern Visayas, I conducted an academic and political inquiry to hear about the everyday experiences of the families to those who are OFWs. Neoliberal globalization, in conjunction with neocolonial state governments, has pushed many Philippine peoples, especially Filipina mothers, to migrate out of mere socioeconomic necessity. As a result, many transnational and transpecific relationships have been formed and maintained.

To identify participants for this project, I made use of personal relationships to direct me towards locations where I could meet peoples that would share their stories. Mainly, conversations that compose the analysis of this project took place on street corners and at people’s homes, while making connections between the histories of our respective countries. As a result of the topics we discussed, this work in progress has evolved into a critical reflection on whiteness, subjectivities, positionalities, and memories.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

• Standpoint theory
• Anti-white supremacist and decolonial framework
• Oral Histories
• Ethnography
• Participant Observation
• Travelogue

CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CONTEXT

3,100 Philippine peoples leave their country each day as migrant workers.
• At any given time, 5 to 10 percent of the country’s population are working as overseas contract laborers, amounting to a total of 5 to 10 million peoples
• Estimates suggest between 30 to 50 percent of the peoples living within the Philippines depend on income sent from an overseas worker.
• “approximately 70 percent [of those overseas] are woman working as domestic servants in middle- and upper-class homes in Europe, Japan, the Middle East, the United Kingdom, and the United States”
• “there are 100,000 registered nurses in the Philippines, but almost none actually reside in the country.”
• “the representation and hypercommercialization of Filipina workers as ideal care workers is a product of a highly coordinated process that [employment agencies] initiate through the construction of their added export value, a unique Filipina labor power that serves as their global comparative advantage”
• “The Philippines is currently the top supplier of shipping labor. Filipino seamen comprise about 20 percent (one-fifth) of the 1.2 million international ship workers.”
• The remittances that Filipino seamen and other OFWs contribute generate the foreign revenue needed to finance these massive international debts.”

CRITICAL INSIGHTS

According to my conversations with some specific peoples, I gained the following subjective understandings:
• The centrality of whiteness in a neocolonial society
• The Philippine State has attempted to erase colonial histories and acts of genocide from Filipinos/as’ memory
• The Philippine State supports colonized ideologies of capitalism that reproduce and project violence onto its own people
• The significance of English to the Philippine State

AREAS OF FUTURE INQUIRY

• Exploring tourism as an economic development model deployed by the Philippine State to complement its OFW model
• Listening to how native Filipinos/as are negotiating tourism for their own purposes and ideas
• Investigating how travelers, especially those in the Philippine diaspora, partner with native Filipinos/as to engage in projects that promote environmental justice

WORKS CITED

[4] Kale Bantigue Fajardo, “Men vs. Women Workers as Ideal Care Workers is a Product of a Highly Coordinated Process that Employment Agencies Initiate Through the Construction of Their Added Export Value, a Unique Filipina Labor Power that Serves as their Global Comparative Advantage.”

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